

Title	Student voice in Irish post-primary schools: a drama of voices
Authors	Fleming, Domnall Patrick
Publication date	2013
Original Citation	Fleming, D. P. 2013. Student voice in Irish post-primary schools: a drama of voices. PhD Thesis, University College Cork.
Type of publication	Doctoral thesis
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Download date	2023-05-05 01:44:45
Item downloaded from	http://hdl.handle.net/10468/1284

Student Voice in Irish Post-Primary Schools

A Drama of Voices

by

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This thesis is presented for the degree of PhD in Education

April 2013

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	i
Declaration.....	iv
List of Tables.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Related research	vii
Abstract	viii
Abbreviations.....	x
 Part I	 1
Chapter 1 – Introduction	2
Theoretical framing.....	2
Conceptualisation	3
Motivations: Why engage the voices of students?	5
Contestation	6
The dramatic questions	7
The programme	8
The location of the drama.....	10
Why view this drama?.....	11
 Chapter 2 - Theorising student voice	 15
Introduction	15
Student voice and pedagogy	18
Student voice contested	22
Student voice and critical pedagogy: ‘ <i>democratic disturbance</i> ’.....	23
Student voice and a discourse of power	27
Cultural capital and the hidden curriculum	31
Conclusion.....	33
 Chapter 3 – Literature Review	 35
Introduction	35
Student voice: a rights-based framework.....	35
‘The right to express those views freely’ (UNCRC, 1992).....	37
Student voice and education for democratic citizenship.....	39
Student voice in pedagogy and school improvement	42
The Irish context.....	46
International student voice research.....	48
An overview of student voice research.....	51
Student voice as transformative of school culture	52
The depth of student voice.....	53
Student voice – a critique of motivation	55
Standards and OFSTED	56
Student voice as an instrument of control.....	57
Student voice as a challenge to a neo-liberal agenda.....	59
Concluding voices	60
 Chapter 4 – Student council as student voice: from policy to research	 61
Introduction to student voice policy in Ireland.....	61

Student voice and the Education Act (1998)	62
Student voice and active citizenship	63
Student voice initiatives in Irish Education	65
The student voice as positioned in post-primary schools.....	67
The student council construct as initially framed in Ireland	67
Student voice: The motivation of evaluation.....	69
School self-evaluation: a changing position for students?	70
The student council as a student voice construct.....	72
A critique of the student council construct in Irish education	75
The student council experience in the UK	76
Conclusion.....	79
Part II	81
Chapter 5 – Research Design	82
Introduction and rationale	82
Qualitative research.....	84
The case study	86
Data collection methods.....	88
The questionnaire.....	89
The interview.....	89
The reflection.....	90
Data gathering in the field	92
The fieldwork.....	96
Summary of data gathered	99
Positioning the researcher	103
Challenges and constraints in data gathering	104
Ethical issues.....	107
Analysis of data.....	108
Coding	110
Conclusion.....	111
Part III	113
Chapter 6 – Student Voice: a drama of experience.....	115
Prologue	115
Introduction	115
A pedagogical script in the Irish classroom	116
The student council script.....	131
Student voice in Irish education policy: a conclusion.....	132
Act I: The students’ voices	134
Introduction	134
Relationships	134
Power and control	137
Pedagogy as experienced.....	139
A tale of two subjects.....	142
Notes - an examination-driven pedagogy	145
Dialogic consultation - the students had their say	147
Student voice.....	149
A close examination of Mathematics - discordant student voices	154
A drama of requests	156
Student voice - actions and reactions	157

Mathematics revisited - a tale of two mathematics classes	161
Conclusion	163
Act II: The teachers' voices	164
Enter the teachers.....	164
A tale of two teachers	165
The teachers' experience	171
Boundaries to student voice – Who is centre stage?	172
The question of outcomes of student voice.....	179
Authority and power – losing centre stage?	183
The question of sustained change	185
Conclusion.....	191
Act III: Student voice and the student council	193
Introduction	193
The student council: a voice for all students?	193
Student voices on role.....	198
Teacher and principal voices.....	201
Summary of voices on role	208
Student Council as enacted during one school year	210
Conclusion - the student council as a construct for student voice.....	224
Epilogue: The Greek Chorus	226
Introduction	226
Student voice in the classroom:	226
The student council – under the spotlights.....	230
Conclusion - a drama of voices	234
Part IV.....	235
Chapter 7 – The Balcony View	236
Introduction	236
Students' voices in pedagogy	236
The student council from the balcony.....	242
The critic and the review	244
Future directions - <i>Terra incognita</i> ... 'there be dragons'	247
Bibliography	251
Appendices.....	273

Declaration

I declare that this thesis, or part thereof, has not been submitted for a degree in University College Cork or anywhere else. I declare that it is fully and comprehensively my own work.

Signed: _____
Domnall Fleming

List of Tables

Table 5.1: Outline of Fieldwork Activity	97
Table 5.2: Case-study schools, teachers, subjects and class groups	98
Table 5.3: Data gathered St Anthony's Community College	100
Table 5.4: Data gathered Bradfield College	101
Table 5.5: Data gathered Castlecourt College	102
Table 5.6: Combined totals for data sources gathered	102

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and sincerely thank Dr Mary Horgan, School of Education, UCC, for the excellent advice and guidance she provided as my supervisor. For her continued hard work and commitment to my efforts that is both visionary and inspiring, I say sincerely ‘thank you Mary’.

I also thank Professor Kathy Hall and gratefully acknowledge the collegial and learning-community support provided by the faculty members and fellow doctoral students engaged in the first cohort PhD in the School of Education, UCC. The regular gatherings both academic and social, the faculty inputs, public lecture series and summer schools scaffolded, directed and empowered my work and development as a learner.

The students, teachers and school principals who provided the voices in this drama were central to the realisation of this research. I wish to acknowledge their willingness to engage with me in this enterprise, their hard work in completing the tasks involved, and the open dialogue and interaction from which the richness of the research emerged.

I would like to acknowledge the support of the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills. My colleagues in the Inspectorate have valued and supported this research from the outset.

At a personal level, I would like to thank my parents, Kathleen and Sean Fleming for the value they placed on our education and for the sacrifices they made to allow all of their children to achieve to our best.

I sincerely thank and also share this study with my emotional partners in this enterprise, Ursula and Daniel. ‘But I, being poor, have only my dreams’...they shared and lived the achievement of this dream and its realisation reflects our deep bonds.

Related research

Conference Contributions

Fleming, D. (2010) *A Voice for Youth*. Meeting Youth Needs in the 21st Century, Conference University College Cork, 12th May 2010.

Fleming, D. (2011) *Student Voice in Irish Post-Primary Schools: Some preliminary findings and directions*. All Ireland Conference for Doctoral Researchers in Education. University College Dublin, UCC, 13th – 14th May 2011.

Study Visit

Education for Citizenship: Study visit awarded by Irish Institute of Boston College: Boston and Austin, Texas, USA. 12 – 22 January 2010.

Articles

Fleming, D. (2011) *Student Voice in Irish Post-Primary Schools: is the challenge too challenging?* The Boolean, 2, pp. 66-70.

Fleming, D. (2011) *Student Voice: A challenge and opportunity for leadership and management*. Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) Congress, Cork, Article for conference folder.

Abstract

An exploration of the expression of student voice in Irish post-primary schools is the central concern of this research study. The research examines how student voice finds expression currently in these schools and how its affordance could impact on students' and teachers' experiences in the classroom, and at whole-school level through a student council.

Student voice refers to the inclusion of students in decisions that shape their experiences in classrooms and schools, and is fundamental to a rights-based perspective that facilitates students to have a voice and a say in their education. Student voice is essential to the development of democratic principles and active citizenship in schools, and is also central to learning and pedagogy in the interaction between the student and teacher in the classroom.

This qualitative research based in three post-primary case-study schools, concerns teachers in eighteen classrooms engaging in dialogic consultation with their students over one school year. Teachers considered the students' commentary and then adjusted their practice. The operation of three student councils was also examined through the voices of the council members, their liaison teacher and the school principal. Theorised within socio-cultural (social constructivist), social constructionist and poststructural frames, the complexity of student voice emerges from its conceptualisation and enactment.

Affording students a voice in their classroom presented positive findings in the context of relationships, pedagogical change and students' engagement, participation and achievement. The power and authority of the teacher and discordant student voices, particularly relating to examinations, presented challenges and affected teachers' practice and students' expectations. The functional redundancy of the student council as a construct for student voice at whole-school level, and its partial redundancy as a construct to reflect prefigurative democracy and active citizenship also emerged from the research.

This research is significant in that, to date, beyond the establishment of a student council, the voices of students have been largely silent or silenced in the context of dialogue and consultation in Irish post-primary schools. Student voice has experienced strong advocacy in both policy, research and practice in many education systems, and particularly in England, demonstrating that it can provide for the rights and citizenship-based democratic inclusion of students in matters that concern them in their schools and classrooms. The redirection of student voice by a school

improvement policy-driven agenda towards performativity and accountability has also been recognised in research literature as a significant challenge to this motivation.

This study has relevance for Irish education in that the introduction, in 2012, of a school self-evaluation initiative by the Department of Education and Skills, for the first time placed student voice within a discourse of school change and improvement, and particularly in the context of teaching and learning. The reform of the junior cycle curriculum, commencing in 2014, will also remove a significant external state examination, and its consequent impact on pedagogy for students and teachers. The Children Referendum and the subsequent thirty-first amendment to the Irish constitution in 2012 further advanced the discourse of children's rights in their interaction with public administration and institutions. Each of these developments has brought the voice of the student closer to the centre of their educational experience.

This research, presented as a drama of voices, provides significant insights into the transaction of dialogic consultation between students and their teachers, and into their consequent experiences of schools and classrooms. The players in this drama are the students and their teachers whose experiences are shaped and mediated through the matrix of policy, curriculum and examination that surround their experience in schools. Students and teachers in this research are engaged in a situated and contextualised student voice drama that is characterised by relationship, trust and significant potential for change in experience. It is argued that within current policy initiatives in Irish education, the challenge for student voice is to remain situated within the voiced interaction of student and teacher in pedagogy, and as dialogic consultation at classroom and whole-school level. It should not become the instrumental student voice of data source, accountability and performativity.

Key words: Student voice, Student council, Prefigurative democracy, Active citizenship, Dialogue, Consultation, Rights, Participation, School self-evaluation, Accountability, Performativity, Pedagogy.

Abbreviations

CEB	Curriculum and Examinations Board
CSPE	Civic Social and Political Education
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Science / Skills (Ireland)
DfCSF	Department for Children Schools and Families (UK)
DfES	Department for Education and Skills (UK)
HSCL	Home, School, Community, Liaison service
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
JCSP	Junior Certificate School Programme
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied
LCVP	Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
MTW	Materials Technology (Wood)
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NEWB	National Educational Welfare Board
OFSTED	Office of Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (UK)
OMYCA	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Ireland)
PE	Physical Education
SCLT	Student Council Liaison Teacher
SCP	School Completion Programme
SPHE	Social Personal and Health Education
TY	Transition Year
UNCRC	United Nations Convention / Charter on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VEC	Vocational Education Committee
WSE	Whole-school evaluation
WSE-MLL	Whole-school evaluation, Management, Leadership and Learning

Part I

Setting the scene



Chapter 1 – Introduction

Chapter 2 – Theorising Student Voice

Chapter 3 – A Review of Student Voice Literature

Chapter 4 – Student Council as Student Voice: from policy to research

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Student voice as a dramatic interaction

*All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages.*

(As you like it, Act II, Scene v)

THE CENTRAL CONCERN of this research was to explore the complex concept of student voice in Irish post-primary schools. Student voice is explored as a drama played out in classrooms and schools where no policy provision, motivation or experience of student voice exists at classroom level. The student council is the only construct for student voice that exists in these schools. The council is conceived as a representative democratic forum to facilitate students to have a voice and to have an '*involvement in the affairs of the school*' (Education Act, 1998). The drama explores how this council, as an existing construct, reflects the concept of a representative student voice, and how affording student voice in the classroom will affect pedagogy, relationships and students' experiences.

Theoretical framing

This research positions the concept of student voice within three theoretical frames. Student voice is theorised as the voice of the student in the classroom within a socio-cultural theoretical framework that views learning as a social interaction and pedagogy as social constructivism. The student is active and agentic in the classroom culture and is learning in a social setting. Within this ideological position, the students' voice is engaged and is central to participation in the co-construction of knowledge. This setting reflects the construct of a classroom where students are actively engaged in learning that is variously directed, facilitated or scaffolded by a teacher based on a curriculum for a specific subject.

This research also positions student voice within a social constructionist theoretical frame that views student voice as dialogue, communication and consultation in classrooms and schools; a student voice that questions and challenges discourse and practice framed within democracy and active citizenship. This is a student voice of critical pedagogy, emancipation and transformation whether in the classroom or at whole-school level.

Student voice in the context of this research is also viewed through a poststructural theoretical frame that challenges the concept in its assumption that a universal, individual or authentic student voice exists. The voices of students are theorised as complex, contradictory and challenging. This theoretical framing therefore sees the voices of students as contextualised and situated within a discourse of power and inequity in their schools and classrooms. Silence and silencing of voices due to cultural capital, privilege or challenge, or the limiting of voice due to inequity, marginalisation or exclusion, contest the social constructivist framing of student voice as agentic and interactive in a social context of learning. It equally contests a constructionist framing of voice as dialogic, consultative and emancipatory, as all are bounded by a power discourse that controls and limits these voices through meanings, constructs and assigned roles and positions that are established and reinforced by practice, authority and imposed policy in schools and classrooms.

This research draws on all three theoretical positions. It places student voice in pedagogy and classroom interaction in the context of social constructivism in identifying the pedagogical experiences of students as situated within subject areas. Through dialogic consultation it traces the process of student voice in pedagogy and identifies the students' requests for change, the actions of the teachers, and the outcomes for both, in the classroom context. This framing of student voice as social constructionism identifies the issues, challenges and contestations of the students' experience through dialogue, consultation and empowerment as articulated through a rights-based student voice in both the classroom and the student council. Through the frame of poststructuralism, the individualised and situated voices of students with reference to age and gender are recognised, as are the effects of curriculum and examinations on students' experiences. The contextualised and authentic voices of individual students are heard as they navigate the discourses of relationships with their teachers and peers, and the power discourses of pedagogy, curriculum and examination. Similarly, these power and control discourses that underpin the interactions of students, liaison teachers and school principals within the student council construct can be viewed and are revealed through this frame.

Conceptualisation

Attempting to define student voice demonstrates its range and complexity. Student voice can be viewed as simply talking to students about their experiences in schools with a view to changing these conditions and the position of the student within school culture (Rudduck, 2005). Student voice can emphasise dialogue and consultation leading to action within a democratic framing of the students' role and position in schools and classrooms (Fielding, 2004b). Student voice can also speak to a rights-based conceptualisation of a student's role and position in schools and classrooms

within which students are afforded a voice in matters that affect them with the clear expectation that their voices will be heard and that action arising from dialogue will result. A rights-based conceptualisation of student voice also brings overtones of challenge to power and authority towards change in schools and classrooms (Cook-Sather, 2006).

Student voice conceptualised as dialogue and consultation is central to this research. Nine teachers afford their students a voice in pedagogy as dialogic consultation in the context of their classroom. The classroom construct captures these situated and contextualised experiences, interactions and relationships with peers and teachers. Within this construct, students normally have a voice in pedagogy through social interaction with their peers and teacher but do not have the right to a voice of consultation and dialogue in decision-making in the classroom. This concept of student voice as challenge, as co-construction or as critical voice in pedagogy is not afforded to students by right or by normal practice in Irish schools. A student voice of critical pedagogy, of dialogue or negotiation is silent and silenced in our schools: silent due to the lack of policy development, provision or motivation, and silenced, arguably, in the classroom, by established practice and routine, by the ascribed authority of the teacher and by the powerful scripts of curriculum and examinations.

The student council is conceptualised in post-primary schools as a representative democratic construct for student voice. The role of the council in decision-making and the depth of consultation and dialogue as democratic participation are questioned in this research, as are the visibility of the council in schools and the level of engagement by the wider student cohort. The student council as a prefigurative democratic construct (McCowan, 2010, 2011) is equally challenged. Such a construct should manifest in schools the type of democratic society that students should live and experience in their daily lives, ‘a harmony between the democratic nature of the institution and the democratic society to be constructed’ (McCowan, 2010, p. 3). This research questions this conceptualisation of student voice within a student council and explores the depth of engagement, scale of participation and involvement in decision-making.

Research and analysis of the affordance of student voice as established practice, particularly in UK schools, reveals hierarchies and variations in depth of engagement by schools (Hart, 1992). Students have been positioned as mere one-way data sources in the completion of questionnaires or commentaries as service users in a school, to working in collaboration and dialogue with teachers and sharing a role in decision making as a deep engagement with student voice (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004). Student voice advocates identify using students as researchers in schools as the deepest level of participation in decision-making leading to change in school culture and experiences for students. In this positioning students are viewed as valued co-participants and

stakeholders in the school contributing through a shared voice to school change and improvement (Fielding and McGregor, 2005). Such variations of the depth of engagement with student voice raise the question of motivation. Why engage with the voices of students?

Research and practice stretching back over fifty years in the UK and USA has identified the absence of the voice of the student in school and classroom. Veldman and Peck (1963, 1969) introduced the concept '*pupil viewpoint*' in their work with beginning teachers in Texas, while Meighan (1974, 1977, 1978a) emphasised '*pupil perceptions*' in early research in UK schools. Fielding (1973) and Stenhouse (1983) began a further early focus on student voice as democratic practice and active citizenship in schools in the UK. However, motivations analysed through research in schools and through policy discourses in the UK, Australia and Canada, crystalised significantly following the ratification of United Nations Charter on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1992. The imperative to give children a say in matters that affect them was transposed into policies and strategies relating to consultation and dialogue in education, in line with partnership and participation models of the inclusion of stake holders in decision-making and the affordance of voice as a right throughout democratic governance and policy making. Schooling and education in England enshrined student voice through legislation and school inspection processes throughout the 1990s. Schools were required to engage with and consult students on issues relating to their experience of schools. School inspection and school self-evaluation processes actively engaged the voices of the students in schools to provide data and personalised insights into the functioning of schools, and into students' learning and social experiences in their classrooms.

Motivations: Why engage the voices of students?

Motivations that concern student engagement, participation and learning inform the rights-based agenda, supported by student voice advocates and policies to improve students' achievement in schools. This moral, social and educational motivation linked closely to children's rights, identifies the absence or silence of students in their experience of schools but significantly in their interaction with teachers in relation to their learning and achievement. Personalised learning initiatives in England progressed the inclusion of the voice of the student as critical in identifying individual learning needs and in transposing these needs into individualised and personalised classroom experiences (Hargreaves, 2004). Such personalised learning overlapped and linked significantly with agendas of inclusion and attention to relationships, self-esteem and a positive classroom and school climate.

Perceived concerns in many countries relating to democratic participation became a further motivation for student voice framed within initiatives to embed education for democracy and active citizenship within the curriculum and practice in schools. Curricular programmes of taught citizenship and democratic principles and practices were introduced to many educational systems, including in Ireland in the 1990s. Similarly, student voice through the creation of a student council construct in various forms became established in many schools across western democracies. Policy envisioned these councils as playing a dual role of providing a construct for a representative voice for students through participation and consultation and thus providing an appropriate role in decision-making. A second role for the council was envisioned as practice reflecting prefigurative democracy that allowed students to experience a representative democracy, collaboration, equality, partnership and shared decision-making towards the common good.

Contestation

Contestation has followed the evolution of the concept of student voice. Many educational researchers argue that the policy discourse, in England primarily, that embedded student voice in schools, was motivated to subvert the concept to meet the demands of a neo-liberal market and performativity-driven educational agenda in the pursuit of standards, measurable outcomes and accountability (Arnot and Reay 2007; Bragg, 2007b, 2007c; Fielding 1996, 2004a, 2010, 2011; Gunter and Thomson 2006, 2007). These researchers and advocates for student voice from all theoretical and conceptual positions identify the use and subsequent dilution and diminution of student voice to a position of mere data source to provide students' views on their experiences in schools to inform measures of school performance through inspection or reporting on school self-evaluation. This coincides with the emphasis on individualisation, measurement of achievement and market-driven competition between schools in the UK. Within this policy discourse, arguably, student voice lost its social and relational role in developing the students' individualised and contextualised social and educational experience in the classroom. Equally, its role as an element of prefigurative democratic practice was lost to curricular programmes of democracy and citizenship as taught rather than experienced in school. The conceptualisation of student voice as a deep participative and consultative dialogue was isolated to individual situations of very good practice in schools or to tokenistic activities and engagements of the student council.

In the Irish education system, beyond the encouragement to establish student councils provided by the Education Act (1998) and the publication of a guidelines document '*Student Councils: A Voice for Students*' (DES, 2002), no other school-based construct for student voice exists in official policy and practice. Whole-school evaluation at post-primary level (DES, 2004), established from 2004, introduced an interview with the student council as a representative voice for students in the

school. This engagement was advanced in 2009 to include questionnaires for a sample of students to gather their perspectives on the schools. To date, there is no requirement on schools to consult with students relating to their lived experience in the classroom and of schooling. The emergence of school self-evaluation in Irish education in 2012 has stimulated conversations relating to student voice into educational discourse in schools. However, in the wider educational field, a consultative voice for students is now present in research initiatives, in the development of targeted strategies, and in the curricular initiatives of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The dramatic questions

This drama poses a key question:

- How is student voice currently manifest in the students' experience of Irish post-primary schools?

However, exploration of this brings into sharper focus a number of significant subsidiary questions that are also explored.

First among these asks:

- How are the voices of students heard in the current pedagogical experience of students in their daily classroom interaction with their teachers?

This question explores student voice in pedagogy as experienced by placing the spotlight on the voice of the student in classroom interactions and their relationships with their teachers surrounded by the scripts and backdrops of established and routine practice, curriculum and examinations.

A second question asks:

- What is the students' experience of student voice when afforded in the classroom?

This question explores the motivation for student voice and how it could be enacted in the classroom. This question seeks to understand the potential effect of student voice on students' experience and teacher's practice in the classroom.

At a deeper level, this question seeks to understand the experience of students and their teachers as they engage in dialogue and consultation about pedagogy. By listening to a consultative and dialogic student voice, teachers reflect on their practice and on their students' experience and consequently, question, modify or maintain their pedagogical practice.

At another level, this exploration of the experience of student voice in the classroom questions the influence of the aforementioned scripts and backdrops of curriculum and examination on classroom practice and students' experiences of pedagogy. It also asks other questions relating to how student voice could influence teachers' professional practice and whether sustained engagement with student voice as a right for students could also have a sustained effect on teachers' practice and on students' experiences. The question of the outcome of student voice for students is therefore posed and explored in relation to student's progress, their learning and their well-being in their classroom. These voices and experiences will therefore question arguments for the vindication of the right of the student to have a voice and a say in their experiences in classrooms.

A third question frames student voice as democratic practice, participation and as an experience of active citizenship. The spotlight turns to the student council in Irish schools and seeks to explore the students' experience of this construct for student voice at school level.

This third research question asks:

- Does the student council construct reflect an expression of prefigurative democracy that facilitates students to have a voice and a say in decision making at whole-school level?

This question also poses further questions relating to the depth of participation of the council and the extent and boundaries of its role in decision-making in the school and the roles of liaison teacher and the school principal in the council's expression of student voice.

Through posing these specific questions, this research seeks to address an overarching question:

- If afforded by right as meaningful and democratic participation, engagement and consultation in the context of school and classroom experiences, how would student voice find expression and how would it impact on students' and teachers' experiences in these classrooms and in the whole school?

The drama of student voice therefore asks these significant questions that seek to explicate how student voice is currently manifest in the students' experience of Irish schools and classrooms.

The programme

In overview, this drama questions and explores the challenge of the affordances and constraints of student voice in Irish post-primary schools. To achieve this, production and direction is required. The programme is presented as four experiences for the audience. **Part One** involves setting the

dramatic scene. It includes this chapter (*Chapter One*), and *Chapter Two*, which examines the theoretical frames through which student voice can be viewed. *Chapter Three* provides an overview and historical perspective of student voice research and related literature while *Chapter Four* explores the student council as a construct for student voice and the evolution of student voice in Irish policy discourse and research.

Part Two of the dramatic experience takes the audience through the building of the stage set in describing the backdrops, scenery and the settings for the research. The research design, outlined in *Chapter Five* that facilitated the production of this drama through engagement with the voices of students and teachers in the case-study schools, is presented.

A drama of voices is then presented as **Part Three**. In *Chapter Six*, the enactment and experience of student voice in the classroom and in the student council is dramatised as a **Prologue, Three Acts and a Greek chorus / Epilogue**. The prologue sets the scene for the student voice drama by introducing the backdrops of curriculum and examination as scripts that have evolved and significantly interacted with pedagogy in Irish schools. *Act I* presents the voices of the students on their experience of classroom relationships and of pedagogy. These voices articulate their experience of dialogic consultation and of the changes they recognised following that consultation. The teachers' voice takes centre stage in *Act II*. These key actors project their apprehension, their reactions to the students' comments, the actions that followed and their view of both the experience and outcome of student voice. *Act III* allows the student council experience to be dramatised and the voices of the council members, their liaison teacher and the school principal to take centre stage. The voices present the student council in these schools, as envisioned by these voices, and as experienced by the students. The challenge of policy and practice in framing a student council construct within which students can have a meaningful role in school decision-making is played out on stage.

A *Greek Chorus* concludes the drama of voices as an epilogue. The chorus, in ancient Greek theatre, commented on and interpreted the drama, its themes, meanings and messages for the audience. This chorus brings together the threads of the drama to weave an aural tapestry of student voice. It uses the lenses of rights, democracy and pedagogy to judge, evaluate and predict the challenge, potential and sustainability for student voice in Irish post-primary schools.

Part Four presents a view from the balcony, which closes the programme in *Chapter Seven*. From the balcony, the drama is reviewed and criticised. The themes, action and revelations are examined and positioned in the context of current policy developments relating to curriculum and evaluation in schools.

The location of the drama

This study is positioned within the socio-cultural and social-constructivist paradigm of research but with a transformative element and potential. As constructivist research, the lived experience of the participants is the subject of the study, and meaning and knowledge, as socially constructed, emerge from interactions between the researcher and the subjects. Ontologically, this research attempts to decipher and understand the multiple voices, meanings, experiences and reactions of the participants whether in the individual classroom interaction of dialogue and consultation, or through student council engagement. Knowledge, meaning and understanding are centred on the individual, social and interactive experience of the participants. Findings and conclusions are subjective, contested and negotiable relating to variables at work in the context of voices, power discourses, subjects, curriculum and examinations. Epistemologically, multiple meanings emerge to create generalisations rather than objective and absolute findings.

Placed within a transformative paradigm this research attempts to challenge the oppression or subjugation of participants; students by the diminution of their right to have a say, and teachers by the limitations placed on pedagogy by curriculum examination in the absence of a coherent pedagogical script. Multiple realities emerge for participants, but from a transformative perspective these realities are viewed through the lenses of power, marginalisation, gender and age. While emerging meaning is interactive and not absolute, findings and experiences are empowering for participants and challenging of established discourse and practice to the benefit of the disempowered or silenced.

While positioned within both paradigms of research, the methodology is qualitative to allow for the social construction of multiple realities and a range of perspectives to interpret the findings. Grounded theory as the frame of analysis complements these paradigm positions as it facilitates the exploration of the issues and boundaries of student voice relating to the socially constructed reality that is revealed. Emerging knowledge, theory or finding are then interrogated, challenged and questioned from a transformative perspective.

This qualitative research was therefore situated in three case-study schools, listening to situated and contextualised student voices in eighteen different classrooms, taught by nine teachers. Three student councils were engaged with over one school year, as were the three liaison teachers and the school principals. The chorus of student voices emerged through questionnaire, reflection and interview. Similarly, the voices of the principals, subject teachers and liaison teachers were gathered through interview and teacher reflection. This case-study research focused on the social

and relational qualities of student voice in pedagogy and in the student council, and on the lived experiences of students and teachers. These voices, in their commentary through consultation and dialogue in the classroom, and through their engagement with the student council, provided a complex and situated web or tapestry of meanings, relationships and issues that this research attempted to unravel and understand.

Why view this drama?

The voice of the student is central to pedagogy and to learning as a social interaction. The voice of the student in active and participative pedagogy supports and scaffolds learning through shared meanings, understandings and reactions in response to teacher direction and interpretation of curriculum. Learning in a social context, whether overly teacher-directed or particularly student-centred, requires the voice of the student to engage, respond and to dialogue within a classroom. This student voice can be bounded and limited by the authoritative control of the teacher or through their practice as circumscribed by classroom structures, the surveillance of the examination and the boundaries of curriculum. This drama explores the pedagogical experience of students in school classrooms to reveal the extent to which their voice is engaged in the social context of the classroom.

The drama should be viewed as the students are empowered to have a voice in pedagogy through dialogic consultation with their teacher within their classroom relationship and context. This rights-based focus raises the volume of student voice from participation to consultation and dialogue towards change and improvement. This drama is unique in that such a voice for students is not a right in Irish classrooms but is afforded as a privilege by these teachers in these case-study schools. The experiences of the students, the reactions of the teachers and the outcomes of a student voice of dialogic consultation could point to a potential justification for the assertion of this right and to the potential outcomes of such an assertion. This student voice could empower the passive silent student; include the marginalised student; challenge the dominant voice of the teacher, and co-construct classroom and school culture. I believe that this drama should be viewed, as it illuminates the challenges, the complexity and the contestation of student voice as experienced in the daily routines of school and classroom practice.

The drama of the student council is also a valid exploration of the concept for democratic practice and active citizenship as experienced through the student council. The drama is of value in that the voices of the leading players reveal the reality of these experiences that can be weighed against scales of participation. The actors reveal to the audience their expectations, their perception of role and their belief, whether realistic or otherwise, in the extent and depth of the operation of the

council. This creates a significant dramatic experience when the reality of their actual experiences with the council emerges. The contestation as revealed between the different actors creates significant dramatic moments on the stage of this potentially ‘staged’ democratic construct for student voice. Democracy without voice, dialogue, consultation, representation and power is a contradiction. The drama therefore points to student voice and a student council as contextualised, situated and negotiated in a contested school and pedagogical space (Taylor and Robinson, 2009).

By indirections find directions out

(Hamlet, Act II, Scene i)

Equality, democracy, voice, participation and right were the primary and principled motivations of this research. The observation and experience of the silence and powerlessness of students in post-primary schools stimulated my motivation to engage with their voices within the constructs, as they exist: the classroom and the student council. My observation and realisation, through long-term engagements with schools as a teacher and school inspector that such silence and silences are embedded, accepted and rarely questioned also motivated this research. Positioning students as young citizens, as co-participants in education and in classrooms as socially constructed learning environments, as having the right to participate, engage and have a say in matters that effect them, is a fundamental belief that further underpins this research. Equally, my belief that the combination of student voice in pedagogy and meaningful engagement in dialogue and consultation at all levels of the school experience is not only morally and educationally justified, but is also very significant for the holistic development of the child, the learner and the citizen, underscores the drama.

This drama was produced to focus on the voice of the student; their voice in the classroom as that space occupied in multiple forms and in a myriad of dramas and social interactions throughout the students’ school life. At post-primary level, a multi-layered classroom experience develops as students engage with different subjects, levels, examinations, teachers and classrooms. This study, within the overall metaphor of a drama of voices, seeks to situate and contextualise the student’s voice within classroom relationships and experiences that are created, engaged with, completed and repeated throughout the student’s interaction with post-primary school. The voices of the students and also those of the teacher were captured in normal classroom practice but also in the context of the affordance of student voice as dialogic consultation. What emerged as the drama of voices reveals the complex yet situated nature of these relationships and interactions.

Such situated case-study research on student voice as dialogic consultation has not been previously undertaken in Irish post-primary classrooms. The voices of students, while excluded from the partnership approach to consultation leading to the Education Act (1998), are now included as

routine practice in consultation on educational policy and curricular developments. The voices of students have been the sources for significant research into the students' experience of pedagogy, focusing on inclusion, well-being and how they navigate, transfer and progress in their post-primary education (Devine 2003a, 2004, 2009; Lynch and Lodge 2002; Rose and Shevlin, 2010; Shevlin and Rose, 2003; Smyth, 2006, 2007, 2009; Smyth, Banks and Calvert, 2011). Enright and O'Sullivan (2008, 2010, 2012) focused on participatory action research with students at risk of marginalisation to negotiate a curriculum for physical education in their Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme that resulted in increased engagement and participation. My research however, explores the voices of students and teachers within and through the experience of student voice across all levels of post-primary schooling. This research is significant in that it situates dialogic consultation within classrooms, subjects and in the context of a fixed curriculum, within the Transition Year (TY) programme, and in the context of external examinations at junior and senior cycle. The focus is on the drama of these voices and how they react to and navigate dialogic consultation. These voices are therefore not only respondents but are also situated participants whose voices provide the narrative of student voice in their classroom relationships and experiences.

Both qualitative and quantitative research has been undertaken on the student council in Irish schools, but none that interrogates the policy discourse, the rhetoric of school management and the experience of the student council members. Keogh and Whyte (2005) examined councils in fourteen schools at a time when councils were developing in schools with a focus on 'enablers, barriers and supports' to 'encourage the establishment of effective and democratic councils in all second-level schools in the country' (*ibid.*, p. 10). In the period since 2005, councils have become established in schools and their inclusion in whole-school evaluation has provided an evaluative focus on their structure and engagements in schools. My research, by focusing in depth on three case-study student councils, over one school year, provides a current, robust and critical view of the council as the construct for student voice at whole-school level.

Internationally, student voice research has significantly focused on advocacy for student voice in schools from a rights-based and democratic citizenship perspective. This mainly quantitative or mixed-methods research has emphasised both advocacy and the gains for students and schools in the context of increased engagement, inclusion, participation and learning by students (Cook-Sather, 2002, 2006, 2009, 2010; Fielding, 1999; Fielding and McGregor, 2005; Flutter and Rudduck, 2004; Thomson, 2007). Research and discourse internationally has also critiqued and challenged the motivations for student voice from the perspective of policy as set against the expression and experience of student voice at school and classroom level for the student (Arnot

and Reay, 2007; Bragg, 2007b, 2007c; Fielding, 1996, 2004a, 2010, 2011; Gunter and Thomson, 2006, 2007).

This current qualitative case-study research is grounded in the drama of the classroom and the council room and looks outward from the students' experience to policy and discourse in seeking to explore the directions and indirections of student voice in Irish post-primary schools.

This study is timely and opportune in that 2012 may have been a pivotal year for student voice in Irish post-primary schools. A school self-evaluation policy initiative (Inspectorate, 2012a) for primary and post-primary schools has begun to be implemented in schools. This, for the first time, places student voice as dialogue and consultation within a directive policy and guideline framework for Irish schools. The discussion and subsequent passing of the thirty-first amendment to the constitution (Referendum Commission, 2012) which provides for the right of children to have their views considered in judicial proceedings also further advances the discourse of children's rights in their interaction with public administration and institutions. The policy agenda to revise the junior cycle curriculum and the Junior Certificate examination (DES, 2012a) is designed to have a significant impact on the students' experience of pedagogy in the first three years of their post-primary education. The potential for a meaningful engagement with student voice within this new junior cycle pedagogical experience can only be viewed positively.

Indications and signals of how these policy initiatives and changes could interact with student voice will arise from this research. Further questions, themes and scripts also emerge to be explored in future dramas.

The play's the thing wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King

(Hamlet, Act II, Scene ii)

Chapter 2 - Theorising student voice

Introduction

STUDENT VOICE IS a multi-faceted and contested concept that concerns the positioning of students and their voices in schooling and in learning. The concept reflects the extent of students' participation, engagement, agency, consultation, involvement and dialogue in their experience of schools and pedagogy. Voice is deconstructed to refer to the actual voice that speaks and the speaker, the actual words spoken and what is said, and the right to speak (Britzman, 1989). In the classroom and school, student voice, it is argued, concerns students' articulation through their voice, what that voice expresses, and their right and freedom to use that voice. It equally concerns what is heard, by whom, and the actions that arise from the expression of student voice (Fielding, 2001a).

Student voice as an emergent and complex concept refers to students in dialogue, discussion and consultation on issues that concern them in relation to their education, but in particular, in relation to pedagogy and their experiences of schooling whether as a student cohort, individual class groups or within a forum construct like a student council. Thus, the concept is both defined and described by a wide range of terms and activities that centre on the repositioning of students to facilitate their engagement with their teachers and schools. Across a range of research, instructional literature and policy documents on student voice, the language and terminology relating to the concept includes variously: 'participation of students', 'involvement of students', 'listening to students', 'consulting with students', 'dialogue with students', 'researching with students', 'students' perceptions', 'students' perspectives', 'evaluation by students' and 'empowering of students'. These terms are used, often interchangeably, in research and in descriptions of activities that reference the concept of student voice as students being engaged in interaction with peers, teachers and school authorities on matters and issues that affect them in their school experiences. Furthermore, while the term student voice is given precedence in my study, the terms pupil voice and child voice are used interchangeably in the literature and in policy discourse.

A range of definitions of student voice illustrates the varied interpretations of the concept and point towards a number of particular emphases. Student voice has been described as:

Talking with pupils about things that matter in school, conversations about teaching and learning; seeking advice from pupils about new initiatives; inviting comment on ways of solving problems that are affecting the teacher's right to teach and the pupil's right to learn; inviting evaluative comment on

recent developments in school or classroom policy and practice...one of the strengths...is the opportunity it provides to hear from the silent – or silenced pupils and to understand why some disengage and what would help them get back on track

(Rudduck, 2005, p. 2).

In the above, Rudduck positions the student as the object in a process of conversations directed by teachers seeking advice and inviting opinion and perspective from students. Students' are largely passive within this description of student voice. The description however, does seek out the disengaged with the intention of re-engaging them through student voice, a theme that emerges throughout student voice literature (Arnot, McIntyre, Pedder and Reay, 2004; Mitra, 2001, 2004, 2007; Nieto, 1994; Rudduck, 2007; Rudduck and Flutter, 2004b; SooHoo, 1993).

Fielding and McGregor emphasise student voice as reflection, dialogue and action combined with discussion as 'student voice covers a range of activities that encourage reflection, discussion, dialogue and action on matters that primarily concern students' (Fielding and McGregor, 2005, p. 2). While the emphasis of student voice is on activities relating to issues that 'primarily' concern students, the role of the student becomes one of active agent engaging in dialogue towards action and, as such, is wider and deeper than 'conversations' and a source of opinion or advice as described by Rudduck (2005).

Facilitating the child or young person to be agentive in the context of their education points to a rights-based definition as 'student voice refers to the process through which children and young people, individually and collectively are able to speak up about their education (Thomson, 2011, p. 24). Being 'able' indicates facilitation towards agency and suggests the right of students to have an individual or collective voice, which has volume in pursuit of action. Cook-Sather (2006) further references students' rights and introduces 'power' within the school hierarchical structure in a definition that seeks 'meaningful acknowledged presence' for students implying a change from a position of silence to active engaged participant. For Cook-Sather, with this acknowledgement of position comes 'the power to influence analyses of, decisions about, and practices in schools' (*ibid.*, p. 363).

A further development of the concept envisions students not only as having a voice, an involvement, and a consultative role in schools, but also acting as participants in critical analysis and research directed at school reform. Students are again positioned as active agents with a deep involvement in:

Initiatives that strive to elicit and respond to student perspectives on their educational experiences, to consult students and to include them as active

participants in critical analysis and reform of schools, and to give students greater agency in researching educational issues and contexts

(Thiessen, 2007, p. 579).

Thiessen positions student voice as co-construction of the school experience. Students become co-participants and researchers within analysis and reform. These ‘initiatives’, it is argued, represent a deep and agentic student voice pointing to a rights-based, emancipatory and democratic orientation for the concept.

The above definitions document the range and levels of student voice from listening to students, through consultation, dialogue and co-participation, to establishing a right to be acknowledged and heard, towards active engagement and participation in change and transformative processes. They also capture the complexity of the concept, which includes reference to democracy and citizenship, policy, children’s rights, discourses of power and inclusion and the issue of representation, authenticity and singularity of student voice.

Notwithstanding this complexity, student voice is a significant issue and concept in the lives of students in that it facilitates students’ perspectives to be expressed, and listened to, and therefore emphasises action and agency. The concept introduces an imperative of rights for children as citizens and can provide for the experience of democracy and active citizenship in schools. ‘Finding voice’, ‘giving voice’ or ‘having a voice’ are now widely used in everyday media and public discourses in reference to empowerment, partnership, rights, equality and democracy. However, in an educational context this representation of a voice for students can be viewed as overly simplistic. Facilitating the voice of the ‘end user’ or consumer to have a say in relation to the quality of the service they experience, it is argued, points to an instrumentalist view point, particularly if directed at consultation, participation and dialogue with students in schools (Bragg, 2007a). Presenting a rationale for facilitating voice as ‘a means to an end’ arguably diminishes the concept to one of external control of student voice towards an instrumental process to improve the quality of the service or educational standards for students (*ibid.*). Such a perception, it is argued, loses sight of any social constructivist or social constructionist interpretation of voice in the educational field where students and teachers seek to engage in the co-construction of knowledge and meaning, and any emancipatory or rights-based and democratic envisioning for student voice. In England, the utilisation of student voice to serve a utilitarian, instrumentalist agenda resulted in contestation and tension, and current developments in student voice and school self-evaluation in the Irish education system (Inspectorate, 2012a) point to the potential for similar tensions.

Furthermore, student voice needs to be situated in relation to power discourses, gender, class and race that operate in schools and classrooms and the range of other agendas whether rights-based,

democratic, or consumerist at the wider policy level (Bragg, 2007a). Deconstructing the concept even from its broadest definition (Rudduck, 2005) points to a ‘cacophony of competing voices’ (Reay, 2006, p. 179) that can be listened to and heard in schools. A deeper analysis of the concept, therefore points to the power positioning of voice in a compulsory school system where the volume of student voice, the extent to which voices are heard, and the awareness of those that are silent or silenced are concerns (Arnot, McIntyre, Pedder and Reay, 2004; Fielding, 2001a). Who is facilitated to speak, who is listening and the question of provision of pedagogical and physical spaces in schools for dialogue (Fielding, 2001a, Lundy, 2007) are further challenges to any view of student voice. Reference to an authentic student voice is also challenged as being dependent on the issues raised by those voices that may be privileged to speak, the questions asked of them, and the values and assumptions of those who are asking and of those who are listening (Chadderton, 2011; Connolly, 1997).

At a macro level, the prominence of the term voice emerged through the civil rights and the feminist movements and the struggle for universal suffrage over the last century (Baker, 1999). Giving and having voice entered popular discourse from the 1960s in terms of participation in the democratic process, civil rights, in the work of minority groups, and the protests and challenges of those who were marginalised or felt excluded from society. Being silenced or the perception of being denied a voice was linked in popular discourse to exclusion, oppression or the denial of rights (*ibid.*). Student voice emerges in the educational policy discourse from a rights-based agenda largely following the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989 and from the presentation of the Charter on the Rights of the Child for ratification in 1992. From this rights-based perspective, the voice of the child was synonymous with engagement, participation, empowerment and equality. In the school context, while these values and positive attitudes towards society and active citizenship were taught through a subject-based curriculum, Fullan (1991, 2001, 2007) noted the absence of any reference to students’ having a voice in school management or leadership while acknowledging that students’ involvement in their learning, and their engagement or disengagement are key elements of a learning school.

Student voice and pedagogy

Students’ learning and their voice in school and classroom practice are theorised in the context of this research as learning in culture. Theorising student voice through a socio-cultural lens concerns learning situated as co-participation and focused on the relationship between that learning and the social setting (Wertsch, del Rio and Alvarez, 1995). Learning therefore centres on social interactions that allow learning to take place (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The focus is particularly on students’ participation and engagement since ‘learning is a process that takes place in a

participation framework not in the individual mind [and] is mediated by the difference of perspective among co-participants' (*ibid.*, p. 15). This concept of situated learning concerns the social context of understanding, communication and the relationship between learning and the social situation. Learning is thus situated as participation in communities of practice and viewed as action and interaction based on shared challenge or learning through interaction with others. Learning therefore increases as engagement and participation in the community of practice increases. Learning in this context is therefore socially situated (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The individual is agentive with the capacity to act and to become, and learner identity is forged within the community of practice (Lave, 1996). Hence, the focus is on learning as it emerges through the evolution of relationships and through participation, activity, interaction and negotiation emphasising:

The relational interdependency of agent and world, activity, meaning, cognition, learning and knowing. It emphasises the negotiated character of meaning and the interested, concerned character of the thought and action of persons in activity. It claims that learning, thinking and knowing are relations among people in activity in, with and arising from the socially and culturally structured world

(*ibid.*, p. 51).

In this way, it is argued that student voice, as pedagogy within this socio-cultural framework, centres on knowledge construction and the interaction between the student and the social world of their school and their classroom. Student voice is therefore implicit within a social constructivist view of learning where knowledge is constructed rather than known and ready to be imparted. Learners are active in building their knowledge on previous learning rather than learning based on the passive transmission of information (MacNaughton, 2003). Hearing and interacting with the voices of students in the classroom are thus central to a progressive and student-centred positioning of learning and teaching. Learning becomes an interactive exchange and a growing in understanding through communication, dialogue and negotiation. Referenced as intersubjectivity in the classroom, constructivist pedagogy reflects 'the interrelationship between teacher and learner, the environment and joint interpretations of learning tasks' (Leach and Moon, 2008, p. 65). The voices of students therefore emerge from pedagogies that reference students' responses and interactions with their peers and teachers. These constructivist student-centred classrooms are characterised by exploration, stimulation and dialogue where each child's growth, identity and development emerge from these interactions with their social and cultural world (Devine, 2003a). Children are viewed as agentive in constructing their perspectives and interpretation of their world as opposed to operating within passive discourses that place children as silent and immature and as 'passive participants of the dominant culture' (*ibid.*, p. 2).

Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner as key constructivist theorists each places students at the centre of learning as they interact with and construct their social world. Learning is centred on students' activity, agency, dialogue and interaction. Social constructivism stresses the student's agency in identity construction through social interaction and being socialised through mediating, manipulating and navigating the rules and discourses of society (Devine, 2003a). Students are active in constructing their own learning rather than being viewed as the passive recipients of distilled knowledge controlled by their teacher (Leach and Moon, 2008). Social constructivism reflects pedagogy that is scaffolded by teachers' strategies, questions and explanations in classrooms. It is viewed as pedagogy that moves beyond transmission and engages students in 'meaningful practices' (*ibid.*, p. 55) that develop and enhance participation and learning through active experiences.

A social constructivist framing of pedagogy also accepts the complexity of students' experiences, their need to challenge and question, and their need for social interaction and participation to build their confidence and self-esteem (Leach and Moon, 2008). Within this, students are active, agentic and vocal, participating in a setting that reflects a culture of learning where:

Participants will create, enact, and experience together and individually purposes, values and expectations, new knowledge and ways of knowing, discourse around shared resources, tools and artefacts, a unique set of roles and relationships as well as physical arrangements and boundaries of the setting.

(*ibid.*, p. 11).

Alexander (2008), similarly sees pedagogy as more than the act of teaching but with the 'purposes, values, ideas, assumptions, theories and beliefs that inform, shape and seek to justify it' (*ibid.*, p. 75). He further discusses pedagogy as a three-dimensional construct involving frame, form and act. The framing of pedagogy is viewed within the classroom space, within time allocations, and the routines of school organisation that therefore shape the students' experience. Form represents the lessons, the practice and positioning of the agents within the lesson, while the act refers to tasks, activities and pedagogical interactions, and the exchanges of knowledge and meanings between students and teachers (*ibid.*).

Pedagogy, as form and act can therefore be viewed as fundamental to the students' experience and student voice in the classroom. It is a dynamic process involving theory, teachers' beliefs and experiences, and significantly, dialogue in classroom interactions. Alexander argues for dialogic teaching to mediate:

The cognitive and cultural spaces between adult and child, among children themselves, between teacher and learner, between society and the individual,

between what the child knows and understands and what he or she has yet to know and understand

(*ibid.*, p. 93).

Such dialogic teaching reflects student voice in pedagogy as conversation and dialogue in the classroom as opposed to a narrow 'recitation script' (*ibid.*, p. 93) of lower-order questioning, recall, minimal discussion and feedback.

It is a central underpinning principle of this research that student voice is implicit in pedagogy characterised by participation in a culture of dialogue. Learners should be in control of their own learning, with a curriculum that is shared and negotiated through dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2008). Dialogue underpins social practice as it links the agent and the activity, their negotiated meaning and their learning. It is fundamental to 'learning, thinking and knowing...among people in activity in, with and arising from the socially and culturally structured world' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 51). Student voice is therefore theorised within Lave and Wenger's conception of learning as co-participation within the 'socially and culturally structured world' of the classroom and school and which is implicit in a social constructivist view of learning.

Similarly, Leach and Moon (2008) present a pedagogic framework set within a socio-cultural and social constructivist positioning of learning that reflects student voice. Such a framework assumes that the mind of the student is multi-dimensional; learning is essentially a social process, and is based on participation and dialogue. Pedagogy within this theoretical frame builds self-esteem and therefore develops 'habits of mind that are questioning and critical...therein lies the power of pedagogy to transform lives' (*ibid.*, p. 7).

In summary therefore, social constructivist pedagogy positions students as active agents within student-centred classrooms where interaction and co-participation are normal and ongoing under the guidance and facilitation of the teacher. Within this context, all students have a voice in the dialogue, co-construction and negotiation of meanings in the cultural world of the classroom environment. Student voice in this context represents dialogue and stresses participation and collaboration between teachers and students (Robinson and Taylor, 2007). Students' voices must, however, be active and encouraged in a student-centred classroom if they are to engage and be agentive in the construction of their learning. By using their voices, students communicate meaning and, within these interactions, shared understandings are created (*ibid.*). Dialogue between student and teacher is fundamental to communication and meaning making, and therefore to student voice (Fielding, 2004b).

Student voice contested

Nevertheless, the above conception of student voice within a socio-cultural frame and social constructivist pedagogy needs to be contested if it implies a one-dimensional or universal student voice. If this is so, it excludes voices that are silent or silenced and the complexity of the aforementioned ‘cacophony of competing voices’ (Reay, 2006, p. 179). Silence can be indicative of being voiceless and powerless or can be an agentic choice of students (Bosacki, 2005). Silence can be linked to autonomy and independence and equally to gendered conformity to social expectations or as a self-protection strategy (*ibid.*). The complexity of silence from the perspective of student voice includes strategic silence by students, or those that feel silenced due to established structures or discourses, the exercise of the power of silence in social relationships or in conflict, harassment or bullying. Conflict and contradictions often emerge in the dialogue or silence between the inner, subjective personal voice and outer social voice (Schultz, 2009). Such an interpretation of the diverse nature of students’ voices challenges and contests the claim for an authentic student voice, but arguably supports a view of student voice as situated and contextualised within the classroom and the student-teacher relationship.

In the context of the classroom, a number of voices can be developed by the student to navigate the challenges of pedagogy, power and othering (Fine and Weis, 2003). Students use an internalised academic voice that is valued by their teacher while their personal or ‘own’ voice can be discouraged and viewed as either challenging or as representing negativity and disengagement. This situation can be further complicated by the privileging, alienation or subjugation of these voices and the students’ language in the classroom or school (*ibid.*). Such discourses of silence or privilege clearly run counter to pedagogy based on dialogue, agency and co-construction.

As a similar critique of student voice and pedagogy, multivocality suggests that students use many voices in learning and classroom interactions and that meanings are socially constructed based on individual experiences, contexts and on the interpretation of questions and interactions with the teacher (Thomson, 2011). These voices reference student discourses of ‘code talk’, similar to ‘own voice’ that shape students’ thinking and perceptions of hidden and coded messages while ‘classroom talk’, ‘subject talk’ and ‘identity talk’ are also identified in classroom participation (Arnot and Reay, 2007). These multiple voices also further question any notion of an authentic, universal or representative student voice in pedagogy (Thomson, 2011). The silence of students is a legitimate element of classroom participation (Schultz, 2009) as students’ interaction in the classroom can also include speaking, listening, non-verbal interactions, graphics and writing. Indeed ‘the student who enacts the stance of listening in silence, attending to what is going on and tracking the conversation, might make an important contribution to the classroom discussion by

signaling assent to an idea or a willingness to learn from others or through creating a space for another to speak' (*ibid.*, p. 7).

Theorising student voice in pedagogy as representing students' agency, interaction, dialogue and co-construction in pedagogy is therefore problematised by the power of silence and silencing. Similarly, a child-centred pedagogy that is overly concerned with order and control, whether through structure or interaction, also limits any critical engagement with the voices of students (Devine 1999, 2001, 2003a). Children when identified as 'other' are largely silenced and distanced from any voice in decision-making or negotiation of the curriculum. The 'othering' of the students arises from pedagogy that emphasises control and protection rather than one that facilitates students to be agentive and critically discursive in interactions with their teachers and peers (*ibid.*, 2001). Such a discourse limits and inhibits student voice in pedagogy, as does the experience of a subject-centred prescribed curriculum and examinations that limit the possibility for negotiation and action: issues that will later emerge in the context of this research.

Student voice and critical pedagogy: '*democratic disturbance*'

Student voice can also be theorised as critical pedagogy that centres on the teacher and student in dialogue and consultation towards confronting problems and issues based on praxis: action informed by reflection (Grundy, 1987). This places student voice within a pedagogy that is emancipatory, that allows students the freedom to act and contest through dialogue towards the creation of democratic structures, and in so doing alter their identity as learners from being objects of the curriculum to active subjects in pedagogy (*ibid.*). A central element of this theorisation of student voice in pedagogy, it is argued, is the discourse of power and authority that emerges in schools and in classroom organisation that underpins the curriculum, interaction in the classroom, and policy, that can subjugate and silence the voices of students.

Critical theorists and social constructionists position meaning, knowledge and learning as socially constructed within the dynamic and framework of institutional power (Gore, 1993; Shor, 1996). In the context of education and curriculum, it is argued, as a central plank of my research, that this power dynamic provides the discourse of what is valued and privileged while also identifying what is excluded and demeaned. Critical pedagogy is therefore the empowerment of students to understand and challenge discourses that alienate and exclude them. It focuses on change and transformation, and the development of practices that are fair, inclusive and democratic (Giroux, 1990). Student voice as a transforming and emancipating instrument is therefore theorised as challenging this discourse of power, exclusion and subjugation (Taylor and Robinson, 2009).

The radical and critical pedagogies of Freire and others, challenge education systems and schools that silence the voices of the individual through the maintenance and transmission of an established discourse of inequality. Critical pedagogy is therefore a student-centred practice, constituted by democratic dialogue that is active and not dominated by teacher direction or inputs, but a practice that encourages students to be agentive (Shor, 1996). The voice of the student is critical in critiquing the established narrative of transmitted education (Freire, 1970) and is seen as empowering students to move from silence to challenge and creating a ‘democratic disturbance of the teacher-centred classroom...to restructure education into something done by and with students rather than by the teacher for and over them’ (Shor, 1996, p. 148).

In a more radical envisioning of student voice it becomes an emancipatory project based on critical pedagogy, within which schools and classrooms are settings and spaces characterised by the challenge of relationship and critique. Fundamental to this positioning is dialogue and praxis as ‘critical pedagogy seeks to draw out student voices and put these voices in dialogue with others in a never ending cycle of meaning making characterised by reflection / action / reflection and new action’ (Rivera and Poplin, 1995, p. 223).

Critical pedagogy therefore extends the conceptualisation of knowledge, learning and pedagogy towards social constructionism. ‘Authentic dialogue’ is generated between student and teacher to shed light on the ‘social reality’ of the student and the curriculum (Alexander, 2008, p. 20). Such critical pedagogy challenges the banking metaphor reflecting instrumental transmission and curriculum as product in its emphasis on Freire’s concept of students’ growing conscientisation. Hence, the relationship ‘between educator and learner becomes a critical co-investigation into real-world dilemmas’ (*ibid.*, p. 91) embracing a pedagogy which liberates both through creating ‘conditions for reflection and dialogue as well as productive cognitive conflict’ (*ibid.*, p. 7).

Student voice, viewed in the context of critical pedagogy, positions students as active agents in their own knowledge construction and resolution of perceived problems and injustice (Cook-Sather, 2002). It is the polar opposite of the oppressive pedagogy of schools and classrooms where students are limited, even ‘dehumanised’ (*ibid.*, p. 4) as learners and instead necessitates ‘authorising student perspectives... ensuring that there are legitimate and valued spaces within which students can speak, re-tuning our ears so that we can hear what they say and redirecting our actions in response to what we hear’ (*ibid.*, p. 4).

At the core of critical pedagogy, students must question political and oppressive structures through reflection and action, leading to change and transformation (Freire and Macedo, 2001). In this context, critical pedagogies position students as active and equal participants in their own

knowledge construction but also emphasise the political nature of education. Through the challenge of critical pedagogy, it is argued that the notion of student participation, consultation, negotiation and empowerment become central to student voice. Student voice as a concept is therefore extended beyond dialogue as communication and is positioned as consultation and negotiation in the school or classroom, and interacting with the leadership or power of the teacher or the school (Shor, 1996).

The focus on dialogue and praxis within critical pedagogy involves students emphasising questions to be asked in their learning. Students move from the silences of passivity to questioning and dialogue. They pose the critical questions of what, why, for whom, against whom, by whom, and in favour of whom (Freire, 1970). The notion of becoming subjects (McCowan, 2010) sees a growing conscientisation; an increased critical consciousness and awareness within students through pedagogy centred on students as individuals and as subjects rather than as silenced objects. Conscientisation represents a growing self-awareness for students through their experience of empowerment through radical and critical pedagogical experiences (*ibid.*). This, it is argued, reflects a view of student voice as a ‘process of self realisation and the emergence of new voices as these young people reflect on who they are and who they are becoming’ (MacBeath, 2006, p. 197).

From a social constructionist perspective, the argument for engaging and consulting with students moves strongly towards the transformative and agentic impact of student voice on pedagogy. Student voice is envisioned as ‘carving a new order of experience’ (Rudduck and Flutter, 2000, p. 75) in classrooms and creating and transmitting new knowledge in relation to school culture and classroom teaching and learning. Whether these involvements are simply instrumental or fundamentally transformative in the context of ‘radical collegiality and dialogue’ (Fielding, 1999) is contested throughout the student voice research community and is a further focus of my research.

Thus, a key question that emerges from this critique is whether student voice as critical pedagogy within a social constructionist frame of reference can transform school culture and classroom pedagogy. While student voice research advocates for the development of transformative classroom practice and culture, the realisation and normalising of this practice in schools and classrooms is contested. Imagining student voice as a central element of a person-centred and participatory democratic school culture that references listening, dialogue, radical collegiality, reciprocal responsibility, partnership, mutuality and authentic democracy represents a vision for an emancipatory and transformative student voice (Fielding, 2011). However, the redirection of student voice by the policy-driven agenda of regressive pedagogy, performativity and

accountability challenges this as it diminishes the role of the student, maintains the power hierarchy of the school, and limits any authentic democratic and dialogic fellowship between partners in the school (*ibid.*).

A further challenge to the transformative potential of student voice is the aforementioned complexity of the concept itself. A key question, it is argued, that underpins the concept, is the existence or non-existence of a representative, authentic and inclusive student voice (Arnot and Reay, 2007; Fielding and McGregor, 2005). The acoustic of the silent and the silenced student and the privileging of some voices is also problematised (Bragg, 2001; Cook-Sather, 2002). Rather than a single voice, it is evident that a multiplicity of voices exists (Breslin, 2011) and that ‘one of the main difficulties in consulting pupils is that instead of a common pupil voice there is often a cacophony of competing voices’ (Reay, 2006, p. 179).

A recognised risk and challenge to student voice is that schools and teachers will ‘listen most readily to voices that make immediate sense to us’ (Bragg, 2001, p. 73). Similarly, Bragg argues strongly that student voice initiatives in schools often favour middle-class voices that are identifiable and understood by teachers (*ibid.*) to the exclusion of the silent, the marginalised and the disengaged (Arnot and Reay, 2007) and the ‘voices we don’t want to hear’ (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 369).

Conversely, it is also argued that ‘one of the strengths of consultation is the opportunity it provides to hear from the silent – or silenced – pupils and to understand why some disengage and what would help them get back on track’ (Rudduck, 2005, p. 2). Disengagement, negativity, disruptive behaviour or a refusal to engage in dialogue and consultation are identified as significant challenges for student voice, while it is argued that schools and teachers should be listening to these negative, challenging and disengaged voices (Bragg, 2001). Thus, a shared conceptual language and a shared understanding of the dialogic process (MacBeath, Myers and Demetriou, 2001) and of the ‘spaces, physical and cognitive [which] are required for participants to make meaning’ (Fielding, 2001a, p. 100) are identified as imperatives for an inclusive student voice.

A poststructuralist perspective further questions the theoretical assumptions that underpin the notion of a universal student voice and a fixed student and teacher identity (Chadderton, 2011) arguing that the concept of an authentic voice ‘ignores the complexity that shapes our experiences including class, race, gender, religion, origin and biography’ (*ibid.*, p. 75). Consequently, poststructuralism argues for an interpretation of student voice that is more flexible ‘underpinned by the understanding of plurality and shifting nature of voices...as either...universal or representative (*ibid.*, p. 81).

The above points towards a positioning of student voice that would avoid the notion of a student cohort as homogenous without reference to the diversity of class, race and gender: an awareness of student voice that is open to hearing contradictory voices and other forms of non-verbal communication, that does not privilege some voices and that seeks out debate and contestation rather than consensus (*ibid.*).

Student voice and a discourse of power

Social constructionist, postmodernist and poststructuralist theorists argue against the notion of a universal truth (or a universal voice) within the web of social, emotional, linguistic, political and communicative experiences and contexts (MacNaughton, 2003). Within a postmodern and poststructural perspective, knowledge is complex, contradictory and subject to change and challenge (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999). The concept of student voice should therefore be bounded in both the context and the culture of specific settings and should be complex, challenging and contradictory. There is a complex and diverse range of voices many that can make difficult listening (Bragg, 2001; Fielding, 2004a). These voices are contextualised and constructed by power relationships and authority in particular contexts and are circumscribed by issues including age, race, gender and class. Engagement of student voice practice therefore has the potential, within individual as opposed to universal contexts, to expose actions and meanings in a classroom by highlighting inequity and issues of exclusion. It can equally free those who are confined or silenced by that context (Taylor and Robinson, 2009).

Poststructuralist theoretical positioning of power and authority as situated, negotiated, enabled and constructed is a further framework within which to theorise student voice (*ibid.*). It is argued that this perspective extends from Freire's positioning to reference Foucault and the complexity and intricate nature of power within an organisation like a school. By theorising student voice as a transforming activity that increases students' engagement and participation in processes and practices from which they are excluded, Foucault's envisioning of power and how it permeates the school presents a significant critical challenge to student voice as an emancipating, inclusive and equalising concept. A postmodernist and poststructuralist theoretical positioning also shares the challenge to the assumption that students can be represented by one voice. The risk that schools and teachers will only engage in deep dialogue with voices that have the language and discourse with which school culture can identify is also a challenge to student voice. Silence can also be equated with power and a discourse of inequality (Fine and Weis, 2003). Schools may seek to silence critical voices (*ibid.*) while silencing can also privilege some voices as 'silence is not

simply the absence of exported marginalised voices; it is the simultaneous and parasitic invitation to voices that dominate and other' (*ibid.*, p. 7).

The students may also express views and opinions that teachers and schools find challenging and unacceptable (Mitra, 2003). Teachers' use of adult language and accepted school cultural norms to interpret student-teacher dialogue can also question the validity and integrity of that dialogue (Bragg, 2001). The challenge for student voice in practice is, at one level, the difficulty of facilitating empowerment of those whose 'voices have been silenced or distorted by oppressive cultural and educational formations' (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 309) without directing students or imposing another discourse reflecting the values of the teacher (*ibid.*). At a deeper level the challenge for the teacher in the classroom is to develop strategies to allow the diversity of students' voices to be heard through dialogue so as to expose how their experiences have differed based on their perceived social position relative to others (*ibid.*). The dilemma for practice however is that:

Although the literature recognises that teachers have much to learn from their students' experiences, it does not address ways in which there are things that...(the teacher)...could never know about the experiences, oppressions and understandings of other participants in the class. This situation makes it impossible for any single voice in the classroom...to assume the position of centre of knowledge or authority, of having privileged access to authentic experience or appropriate language

(*ibid.*, p. 310).

Knowledge emerging from student voice is therefore limited by and situated in the students' experience of gender, race, class and any of a range of other elements of difference. These voices can be thus viewed as 'oppositional challenges'...rather than reflecting 'a sharing of the students' experience and understanding of oppression' (*ibid.*, p. 310).

The student voice of challenge and transformation must thus be viewed through the lens of power. Discourse concerns meanings and understandings that are learned through established routines and practices, and that are interpreted through the lenses of race, class and gender. Students learn and exist within and through discourse and therefore student voice will be shaped by discourse in the school and classroom, however, it is argued that student voice also has the potential to challenge and transform established discourses.

Power is expressed in and is exercised through discourse (Foucault, 1979). Foucault saw social institutions sustaining themselves through a discourse of truths that defined actions (Gore, 1993). These truths identified and sustained what was valued and privileged. Awareness of distortion, privilege and silence allows us to understand how meaning and discourse are constructed (Foucault, 1979). Discourse viewed as what is said, who speaks and with what authority, is central

to Foucault's analysis of the complexity of power and its possession in an organisation. Discourses and meanings however, arise from practices and not from written policy or the spoken word (Ball, 1990). Dividing practices that involve classification, control and containment objectify the individual within the organisation. Those with power control discourse through dividing practices, which limit the freedom and identity of members of the organisation (Marshall, 1990). Foucault's principal of discontinuity further points to discourses and practices that can and do change their meaning as they are deployed at different levels of an organisation and are received by different members. It is argued that the range of interpretations, affordances and limitations to student voice must also be viewed through the lenses of dividing practices and the discontinuity of discourse.

Coupled with discourse, dividing practices and discontinuity is the concept of normalisation (Foucault, 1979). Judgements, measurements and rules establish a discourse as to what is normal, expected and abnormal. Power within an organisation like a school or classroom is normalised through the establishment of an artificial order that is observable. Behaviours are then judged and measured, and shared common values and goals emerge within a complex interrelated hierarchical structure (Ball, 1990). Management is empowered and empowers others through sharing these normalising discourses and it is the combination of knowledge and power as a power / knowledge discourse that divides and subjugates. Surveillance facilitates quantification, classification, judgement and punishment. Those to be controlled are viewed as objects and both knowledge and power combine to achieve subjugation (*ibid.*).

Students, in a school or classroom, within this power / knowledge discourse, can be viewed as... 'passive participants of the dominant culture' (Devine, 2003a, p. 2) experiencing a curriculum that is centralised, non-negotiable, subject-centred and disempowering (*ibid.*). The resulting discourse of power in the school, it is argued, controls and disempowers students and their voices through discontinuity, dividing practices and normalisation, and is maintained through continual surveillance. Examination as a form of surveillance then combines normalising judgements and power within this hierarchy (Foucault, 1979).

Foucault views examination as central to power and to discipline (Hoskin, 1990). The examination is the key linkage between power and knowledge. In the context of education, Hoskin argues that curriculum and examination prescribe the discourse of what is valued as knowledge, what is learned in the context of disciplines, and how it is learned in terms of pedagogy. Therefore, power classifies students and defines teacher identity based on discourse. Teacher identity is also constructed, objectified and subjugated by normalisation and discontinuity and similarly, by the power of surveillance and examination (*ibid.*). Hoskin therefore argues that Foucault sees schools as:

The exercise of power and the constitution of knowledge in the organisation of space and time along ordered lines so as to facilitate constant forms of surveillance and the operation of evaluation and judgement

(*ibid.*, p. 31).

It is argued therefore that a theorisation of student voice within this discourse of power reveals how the potential and possibility for consultation, participation and action by students in pedagogy and decision-making can easily be thwarted and trivialised. Therefore,

Foucault's emphasis on power as it is exercised through producing definitions of normality, domains of truth, classifications of other through institutionalised practices sensitises us to the significance of school practices in defining children and childhood in line with dominant discourses of the day

(Devine, 2003a, p. 113).

'Institutionalised practices' translated into the Irish post-primary school context are grounded in a discourse that focuses students' learning on a curriculum and examination that reflects the needs of the economy and the adult world and that does not permit consultation with student on decisions in schools or classrooms (*ibid.*). In this context, students are classified by age and labelled and numbered by group, ability level and programme. The daily experience of students in Irish schools suggests that the voices of school management and teachers are privileged above those of students and parents (Devine, 2001 2002, 2003a, 2009; Lynch and Lodge, 2002).

Student voices in the wider school are limited to the student council whose operation is controlled through surveillance by school management. In the context of the classroom, students' voices and identities are normalised through a discourse that situates students as silent learners following an imposed externally assessed curriculum that teachers and school management control within an organised disciplined institution (Devine, 2003a; Lynch and Lodge, 2002). Students experience dividing practices based on age, ability, social class and school choice. These divisions are normalised under the surveillance of rules, homework, examinations and performance-related testing. Children are subjugated in schools through traditional discourses that see them as vulnerable and dependent and therefore positioned without power and without involvement in decision-making (Devine, 2003a; Lynch and Lodge, 2002). A situation of otherness is created through the control and silencing of students in the context of the curriculum, examinations, timetables, the symbolic organisation of space in the school, classroom rules and the perceived privileging of some students and devaluing of others based on gender, race class or disability (Devine, 2003a). It is argued therefore that power and control are exercised in the school by normalising the position of the student as powerless, as outsider or as 'other' in decision-making processes. Othering is central to the exercise of a power and control discourse in schools and has a clear impact on students' perception of their status, on their relationship with their teachers, and on the way they view their rights as students in the school.

There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that schooling practices that fail to respect the autonomy and individuality of the student, that fail to manage power relations between students and teachers in a respectful manner, may have quite negative educational consequences

(Lynch and Lodge, 2002, p. 149).

Using the lens of Foucault, it is argued that student voice as consultation, dialogue, partnership and participation in a school structure will be challenged and limited by the dominant power / knowledge discourse, by the policy discourse of schools and education authorities, and by discontinuity in the way discourses are internalised and normalised within school culture. In the context of Ireland and England, it can be argued that examination and surveillance in the context of the centrality of curriculum delivery and internal or externally based assessments of students, or overall school performance, have created a performance-orientated and outcomes-driven script for teachers reflective of a neo-liberal and consumerist agenda (Arnot and Reay, 2007; Fielding, 2007, 2011; Lodge, 2005, 2008). Student voice initiatives risk tokenism within the constraints of these discordant discourses and the power hierarchy of student, teacher, principal and government, which seeks to preserve, rather than challenge or transform (Taylor and Robinson, 2009).

Hence the power hierarchies embedded in school culture mediate students' experience (MacNaughton, 2003). Meanings are shaped and influenced by those who have power and the instruments or artefacts that express that power. In a school setting, the positioning of the principal, the teachers, the timetable, pedagogy, the curriculum, the student council, and the symbolic organisation of space, articulate a discourse of meanings to students that mediates their voice. The power discourse therefore controls meaning construction and whether expressed through the identity of the teacher or by way of privileging in the context of race, class or gender, will mediate meaning construction within that setting. Students' willingness to use their voice in interaction and discussion in classrooms and their engagement with consultation or dialogue, it is argued, are therefore circumscribed by the power hierarchy and by the discourse of knowledge and meanings that is constructed within this power/knowledge discourse.

If children are not given a voice and this voice is not heard and listened to, children experience school as imposition: something done by adults to, rather than with them. The exercise of power is central to this process, translating dominant discourses into practice in an institution dominated by hierarchy, authority and regulation

(Devine 2003a, p. 143)

Cultural capital and the hidden curriculum

The construction of meaning by students and their voice in their interactions in school culture can also be mediated by the discourse arising from the concept of cultural capital and the hidden

curriculum. At school level, student voice and the aforementioned power knowledge discourse within which they operate can be viewed through the further lens of habitus and cultural capital. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and practice situate voice as a central agent of the individuals' interaction and participation. Habitus draws together the elements of the individual's being, actions, thoughts and past experiences (Bourdieu, 1977). This on-going interactive process influences choice, action and agency in our world or field. Social practice requires an understanding of the relationship between an individual's habitus, situation and agency within that field of practice (Grenfell and James, 1998). In a school setting, it is argued that expected behaviours, power structures and the positioning of students and teachers are embedded within the school or classroom as the field of practice. Students become socialised into a school and classroom culture as a field of practice where habitus is circumscribed by routines, rules, traditions, culture and power. Participation and agency are therefore bounded in Bourdieu's field of practice within and by the concept of habitus. Bourdieu argues, however, that cultural and social capital allows the individual to access, to navigate and to compete for advantage in their field of practice (*ibid.*). Key elements of social and cultural capital include language and access to resources and the knowledge that conveys some social, economic or educational advantage. The concept of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977) and the hidden curriculum (Giroux, 2001) are linked within the theorising of student voice based on the premise that school authorities and teachers may only listen to and hear the voices of students who are privileged to share the social and cultural capital of teachers and those in school leadership (Fielding, 2001a). The voices of those without this capital and the voices of those that may challenge and criticise, while being heard, may not be listened to (Bragg, 2001; Chadderton, 2011; Cook-Sather, 2002). Those in possession of cultural capital are the least likely to challenge and assert their voices as:

Children who possess the cultural capital to know and actively play the system choose to accept the patterning of child/adult relations in school – those who do not subscribe – working class boys actively resist teacher authority through daily inattentiveness and misbehaviour

(Devine, 2003a, p. 34).

In schools, students are immersed in an unwritten curriculum that expresses the values and relationships that are central to socialisation into the accepted school and classroom culture (Kentli, 2009). Thus, the hidden curriculum, can therefore be viewed as the embedded norms, values and beliefs that impact and shape relationships in the school and classroom (Giroux, 1980). The hidden curriculum can also reflect the hidden discourse of schooling as transmitted through practice and structure. Schools can be seen as situating students in a largely hidden discourse of preparation for work and productive economic activity, creating a parallel between labour in school and in the work place. Rewards and rules provide surveillance and control to maximise productivity (Devine, 2003a). Schools in this context are viewed as political institutions where the

possession of power and relations of power in terms of class, gender and race both emerge and are sustained (Giroux, 2001).

These interpretations of the dynamics of the hidden curriculum can be challenged in that they position students as passive and accepting of this school culture and of the hidden curriculum. Students are positioned as the passive products of a socialisation process that is without mediation, conflict or challenge to the accepted discourse (Lynch, 1989). However, the ability of students to navigate and mediate these hidden discourses and to create their own is evident in terms of patterns relating to peer groups, popularity, belonging, bullying and a culture of not telling. Spaces and physical boundaries where these hidden discourses that run counter to the power and control discourses of the teacher are expressed and are also identifiable include the playground, corridors and toilets (Devine, 2003a). The notion of a hidden curriculum and hidden discourse, it is argued, further points to the complexity of student voice while highlighting the challenge of engaging with critical dialogue or social constructionist meaning-making by students and teachers in schools.

Conclusion

The concept of student voice is complex, contested and problematised when examined and deconstructed through a number of theoretical frames. It is argued that student voice can sit with some ease within a social constructivist pedagogy that seeks the voices of students to be agentic in their learning and meaning making within the socio-cultural context of school and classroom. It can be further theorised using a social constructionist lens as being transformative through critical pedagogy by empowering students to speak, to dialogue and to challenge and transform. As an emancipatory project, student voice can be theorised as dialogue, consultation and critique, in the context of Freire that can question and challenge established discourse and power hierarchies. A postmodernist and poststructuralist theoretical lens, it is argued, allows for a theorisation within the boundaries and limitations placed on student voice by an appreciation of Foucault's power knowledge dynamic, Bourdieu's concept of habitus, field and capital, and Giroux's influence of hidden curriculum. Issues relating to competing discourses, othering, structures and spaces, the multitude of voices, motivations, media, identities and silences challenge any certainty or solidity to the concept.

Student voice is therefore visualised as an on-going process that is contextualised, situated and negotiated in a contested space (Taylor and Robinson, 2009). A poststructural and postmodern theoretical articulation of student voice points to an appreciation of the complexity and challenge of the interaction of power with any authentic and emerging student voice in schools. The utopian notion of one unifying authentic student voice reflecting equality, justice and democracy

(Ellsworth, 1998) is dismissed, and new meanings, different interpretations, and a variety of discourses are visualised (Taylor and Robinson, 2009). Notwithstanding this complexity, Cook-Sather (2007) sees both the challenges and the potential in advocating for student voice in creating, recreating and re-energising learning through the participation of students.

What is lost is the unchallenged complete power and authority of the teacher and their assumed control of content and process. What is gained is a reinvigoration of the process of learning by infusing it with the insights and participation of students, and something is created anew - relationships, knowledge and understandings

(ibid., p. 844).

Chapter 3 – Literature Review

Introduction

STUDENT VOICE HAS experienced strong advocacy in research, education policy and in schools particularly in the UK, and in schools where students are experiencing disadvantage and social exclusion in the USA and Australia. The obligation placed on signatories to the United Nations (UN) convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) followed by the ratification of the UN Charter on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1992), to enact and respond to its requirements, with particular reference to Article 12, generated significant legislative and policy-making activity in many countries, including Ireland but particularly in England. The specific interpretation of Article 12 became a focus for legislation, policy, guidelines and practice in the areas of education and social care. In England, this resulted in a number of actions in the context of education that included the strengthening and raising of the profile of student or school councils, consultation with students as an aspect of school inspection and the requirement on schools to consult with students on a routine basis in the context of school self-evaluation and school reform.

In Ireland, in the educational context, the establishment of student councils in schools arising from the Education Act (1998) was the single significant step towards facilitation of student voice in post-primary schools. Students were also routinely consulted during external school evaluations from 2004. There has been an increasing pattern in the inclusion of the voice of students in policy initiatives at national level, however the implementation of policy relating to school self-evaluation in 2012 brought student voice to the fore in Irish schools (Inspectorate, 2012a).

Student voice: a rights-based framework

Rights are defined as enabling an individual:

To stand with dignity, if necessary to demand what is our due without having to grovel, plead or beg

(Freeman, 1987, p. 300).

The movement towards children's rights is framed in the context of respect for, and an appreciation of the dignity and autonomy of young people. Constructs and images of children have often viewed them as either the possessions of their parents, as victims, or as innocents without cares, responsibilities or agency (Bandman, 1973). This reflects the often teacher-centred contention in schools between the perceived needs of the child and their rights. An over emphasis on kindness and care in schools can result in 'othering', controlling and silencing the child

(Devine, 1999). Children's rights advocacy has attempted to re-position children as active and agentic young citizens to be included in actions and decisions that affected them.

Autonomy for children in decision-making relating to life choices was a central argument within a rights-based framing of student voice, but this position was contested. A caring nurturing orientation that shields and protects children from the adult world did not sit comfortably with an orientation based on self-determination by children and the emergence of their rights within an adult world (Dworkin, 1977). Student voice can be placed within this self-determining, rights-based agenda as recognition of 'the moral integrity of children, entitled to equal concern and respect, and entitled to have their autonomy and self-determination recognised' (Freeman, 1987, p. 309). Linked to these arguments is the repositioning of children as developing citizens within a democracy with an entitlement and a right to a voice as 'our future lies in treating our children seriously and that this involves recognising them as rights-holders' (*ibid.*, p. 371).

These arguments for the right of students to negotiate, to demand engagement in consultation, and to participate in school decision-making (Silberman, 1971) have a long history in education in the UK and are central to the framing of student voice within the children's rights framework. Twenty-seven items for change focusing on school organisation in terms of discipline, compulsory uniform, freedom of movement and school rules were outlined in England in 1972 by the National Union of School Students (Wagg, 1996). The Humanities Curriculum Project (1975) produced a further list of rights and expectations of fair treatment based on consultation with students. These included rights concerning respect, communication of aims, procedures and organisation, and also curriculum ideology and skills for life (Stenhouse, 1983). Moreover, legislation at national and international level advanced the children's rights agenda pointing clearly towards consultation with young people. As illustrated below, while the early legislation references children in care, the right of the child to be consulted was established by statute. Consideration of the child's views first appeared in legislation in the UK in 1980 as a condition that local authorities 'shall so far as is practicable, to ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child regarding the decision and give due consideration to them' (UK, Child Act 1980). This consideration for the wishes of the child was advanced by the Children's Act (1989), which stated that 'before making any decision with respect to a child they are looking after...a local authority shall...ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child (UK, Children's Act 1989).

‘The right to express those views freely’ (UNCRC, 1992)

The UNCRC (1989) followed by the ratification of the UN Charter on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1992), by all countries with the exception of the USA and Somalia were significant milestones in advancing children’s rights. Article 12 of the charter required that:

1. States parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

(UNCRC Article 12:1,2, 1992)

Ratification of the charter was seen as significant in positioning the child as a full human being with the ability to participate freely in society (Freeman, 1996). It principally focused the argument for the right of the child to be consulted in... ‘all matters affecting the child’ (UNCRC, 1992). Article 12 combines the aforementioned needs of the child in terms of provision and protection with their right to participate in decision-making. Thus ‘it brings together the familiar view of children as in need of protection and provision...with a different view, of children as individuals in their own right, as ‘social actors’ who can form and express opinions, participate in decision-making processes and influence solutions’ (Bragg, 2007a, p. 11).

The obligation to incorporate the charter into the legal framework of a country is widely viewed as the catalyst for the development of what became termed as ‘*student voice*’ in many ratifying countries (Rudduck and Flutter, 2000). It is noteworthy however that the United States government did not ratify the convention due to concerns about the perceived erosion of the authority of adults (Kilbourne, 1998).

While contested, the widespread and varied translation of the obligations of article 12 advanced student voice actions and initiatives, and became the framework for policy development and strategies in many jurisdictions (Noyes, 2005). However, Lundy (2007) argued that the obligations to transpose Article 12 into policy and legislation required two elements to be provided to children: the right to express a view; and the right to have the view given due weight. Four conditions or structures were identified to fully realise the potential of article 12 as the foundation for deep and meaningful student voice: space within which children can express a view; voice to allow them to express their views; an audience that will listen; and that their expressed views will stimulate a response and action (*ibid.*). The translation of article 12 into student voice initiatives at policy and school level is debated as:

Article 12 is one of the most widely cited yet commonly misunderstood of all of the provisions of the UNCRC. It is often mentioned under the banner of 'the voice of the child', or 'pupil voice', as it is more commonly referred to in education. Other abbreviations include: 'the right to be heard', 'the right to participate' and/or 'the right to be consulted'...each has the potential to diminish its impact as they convey an imperfect summary of what it requires' (ibid., p. 930).

Lundy strongly questions the motivation, beyond the rhetoric, of policy makers and schools to provide the four identified conditions for the development of a meaningful student voice within this rights-based framework.

The aforementioned establishment of student councils as referenced in both the Education Act (1998) and the National Children's Strategy (2000) was the visible response in education policy in Ireland to Article 12. The thirty-first amendment to the Irish constitution in 2012, which provided for the right of the child to have their views considered in judicial proceedings, was also clearly informed by the obligations of Ireland's ratification of the UNCRC as 'the views of the child shall be ascertained and given due weight having regard to the age and maturity of the child' (Referendum Commission, 2012).

In England, a range of policy initiatives exploring students' perspectives and referencing pupil voice in schools began following the UN charter. The ratification of the charter resulted in the 1992 Framework for Inspection of the Office of Standards in Education requiring inspectors to talk to students about their work in schools (Rudduck, Chaplain and Wallace, 1996). The enactment of the UK Education Act of 2002 further required English schools to consult students about decisions that affected them. The Education and Skills Act of 2008 again extended the momentum behind the right of students to have a voice in their schools. This required the governing body of a school to appropriately consider the views of students when making decisions to ensure that 'local authorities and schools must work in partnership with children and young people, as one group of stakeholders among many. Only then can participation make a positive difference' (DfCSF, 2008, p. 5).

School principals were asked to show evidence of how they used the outcomes of consultations with students, and schools were asked to complete a self-evaluation form in advance of an inspection within which they were asked to demonstrate how the school consults with students and uses their feedback to improve teaching and learning (OFSTED, 2010).

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in England, later re-named as the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DfSCF) has produced a range of policy documents for schools

and other education providers that embedded and supported these requirements towards developing a culture of listening to students, consulting with them and facilitating their participation in decision-making in schools including: *Learning to Listen: Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People* (DfES, 2001); *Building a Culture of Participation: Involving children and young people in policy, service planning, delivery and evaluation* (Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin, and Sinclair, 2003); *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* (DfES, 2004a); *Working together: giving children and young people a say* (DfES, 2004b); *Listening to the voices of children and young people* (DfCSF, 2008). All include language in their titles that points to the significant advancement of a children's-rights agenda in education in England in the context of student voice as consultation, dialogue and participation.

The promotion of personalised learning within education policy in England can also be viewed as a further development of student voice from a rights-based perspective. Personalisation of learning, as an education policy initiative, focused on ensuring that the learning needs of individual students were addressed in schools and classrooms (Hargreaves, 2004; Ruddock, 2006). Using the voices of students was viewed as a key element of personalised learning. Personalisation required schools to prioritise engagement with learning, personal responsibility for learning, independent learning and the development of confidence and maturity in students (DfES, 2004c), to be achieved through teachers and students working together to improve learning (Hargreaves, 2004). Student voice was identified as one of the nine gateways to personalised learning that facilitated students 'to play a more active role in their education and schooling as a direct result of teachers becoming more attentive, in sustained or routine ways, to what students say about their experience of learning and of school life' (*ibid.*, p. 7). However, Fielding and others challenged student voice in this context, as a neo-liberal administrative strategy aimed at school improvement and performativity rather than at the person-centered learning needs of the individual student (Fielding, 2007).

Student voice and education for democratic citizenship

Rights-based, citizenship and democratic frameworks were closely aligned within the development of the concept of student voice in schools (Bragg, 2007a). The development of sustained democratic principles in schools and the provision of education for citizenship for students were also closely related actions in the emergence of student voice (*ibid.*). Again article 12 of the UNCRC was a particular catalyst for these changes in schools in the UK:

Compliance with Article 12 will not only foster a positive school ethos and produce better citizens, it is a legal and moral imperative

(Lundy, 2007, p. 939).

Engagement in decision-making from a democratic active-citizenship perspective is highlighted throughout student voice research as a further positive outcome alongside the educational and pedagogical advantages of student voice. In many countries however, the need for citizenship education became a concern and the creation of school (student) councils and the provision of taught citizenship programmes was the policy response. The Crick Report (1998) recommended the introduction of a programme for citizenship into the National Curriculum in the UK. The introduction of Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) into the Irish Junior Cycle curriculum in 1995 (DES, 1995), and the planned implementation of 'Politics and Society' for senior cycle (NCCA, 2009a), marked a similar curricular response in Ireland.

Education for democracy and active citizenship has emphasised the reinforcing of human-rights based values, the empowerment of stake holders and the involvement of staff, students and parents in all important school decisions (Dürr, 2004). It has however been argued that while active citizenship requires involvement, debate and participation by students and the school recognised as 'the preparatory system for citizenship' (*ibid.*, p. 12), the actual involvement of students in co-responsibility and decision-making has been very limited. Consequently, it is contended that 'teaching and learning about democracy will fail unless it takes place within a democratic educational framework and environment (*ibid.*).

It is equally argued that education for democratic citizenship cannot be taught but must be experienced by students (Huddleston, 2007; Kelly, 1995; McCowen, 2011). Student voice therefore has the potential, as an element of inclusive democratic citizenship, to recognise different voices and to facilitate equal participation by students. The absence of voice, power and agency for students to control and address issues that concern them is viewed as a symptom of social exclusion (Ranson, 2000) while structures and institutions that embed a culture of democratic citizenship facilitate the development of the voice of the individual and the consensus voice of a democratic community (*ibid.*). Student voice in this context has been central to participatory democratic constructs in schools like student forums, committees or councils. These representative democratic structures were designed to facilitate students to participate in policy development, planning and decision-making at whole-school level. Huddleston (2007) however, argued for student voice constructs that reflected partnership and inclusion in shared decision-making in schools. Rather than seeking a transfer of power to students, these strategies should strive to become 'an instrument of shared school governance rather than simply student self-governance' (*ibid.*, p. 23).

Participation therefore became a key term in reference to student voice and the development of active democratic citizenship in the context of schools. An inclusion agenda viewed consultation

as an element of students' participation in school whether at classroom or at whole-school level (Rudduck and Flutter, 2004b). However, consultation and participation were viewed as different elements of student voice. Consultation concerned listening to students and acting on their views while, in addition, participation involved students in a deeper involvement in decision-making processes at school and classroom level (*ibid.*). Rudduck and Flutter viewed participation arising from consultation with students as having the potential to be transformative while recognising that school culture was informed by class-based principles of power and control.

In this context, consultation as simply the provision of student's perspectives is contrasted with student voice that involves students' participation to effect change and improvement. Student voice is therefore viewed as a deeper participation that includes dialogue, negotiation and decision-making in the context of a democratic process at school and classroom level. This democratic-citizenship conceptualisation of student voice seeks to include the marginalised and the silenced, and to challenge school culture, power positioning and the embedded identities of student and teacher (Rudduck, 2007; Rudduck and Flutter, 2004b).

Democratic schools and classrooms are generally characterised as places where all students have access and opportunities to share their perspectives, contribute to decisions related to their learning and where authority is shared (Shultz, 2009). Democratic conversations reflect critical pedagogy (Alexander, 2008; Shor, 1996) and are therefore conceptualised as interactions that may include conflict and challenge rather than just simply engagement and dialogue. The need for a shared language and vocabulary has been highlighted as critical for students and teachers so they can identify and filter either silent or dominant voices in these classrooms (Shultz, 2009).

The student or school council became the principal participatory democratic structure in schools with the dual role of providing an opportunity for lived representative prefigurative democracy and a construct to articulate student voice in schools. In the UK, the Crick Report (1998) and the Education Act (2002) did not recommend the establishment of statutory school councils, even though they have flourished and are now present in the vast majority of English schools. Models of student council structures, including school meetings, school councils and school parliaments or congresses were identifiable in the progressive 'new school' sectors of English education since the nineteenth century and were positioned within the expanding movement within schools to promote democracy and develop democratic citizenship (Chapman, 1970b; Fielding, 2010). School councils are not currently required by statute in schools in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. A school council is required in Welsh schools. In Ireland, the Education Act (1998) provided the opportunity for councils to be established in post-primary schools and associated guidelines set out the recommended structures, role and functioning of a student council (DES, 2002).

Tokenism and limited democratic engagement in decision-making has been an on-going and regularly cited feature of students' perception of school or student councils. This criticism challenges the concept of a student council as an instrument of student voice and as a construct for representative democratic participation (Alderson, 2000; Fielding, 2007, 2011; Hargreaves, 2004; Keogh and Whyte, 2005; Rudduck and Flutter, 2000; Taylor, 2002; Whitty and Wisby, 2007; Wyse, 2001). This theme is further examined in Chapter Four.

Student voice in pedagogy and school improvement

The emergent strands of student voice in pedagogy and school improvement from the research literature include: the use of students' perspectives to inform external research into their experience of schools and classrooms; teachers using students' perspectives to inform their pedagogical practices, and school management and leadership consulting with students as consumers or clients to provide insights into schools-focused change or improvement. Other interlinked strands include: policy developments that reference student perspectives particularly in school inspection; school self-evaluation; personalisation of learning; and school improvement based on examination outcomes and the related publication of measures of school performance often referred to as 'school league tables'.

References to the conceptualisation of student voice as dialogic consultation relating to pedagogy reach back to the nineteen-sixties. Some of the earliest references to the inclusion of student voice in pedagogy emerge from the development of evaluation instruments for beginning teachers used as one source in evaluating student teachers in the University of Texas (Veldman and Peck, 1963, 1969). 'Pupil viewpoint' can be identified as a very early reference to students' perspectives on student teachers (*ibid.*, 1969, p.107) while the term 'pupil perceptions' was coined in early student voice activities in England (Meighan, 1974, 1977, 1978a, 1978b). Meighan may be the first researcher in England to engage with student voice to provide an insight into students' experiences in the classroom, in this case with student teachers. In an early experiment with student voice, 502 students responded to sixteen questions in relation to twenty-one student teachers. Each teacher asked the students directly:

*I would be interested in your opinions about my teaching. I would like to know
what I do well and what I could improve*

(Meighan, 1974, p. 143).

Resistance to the use of students' perceptions was articulated by school principals in the schools used by Meighan in this research and centred on the principals' perceptions regarding the students'

lack of competency to form a judgement or opinion, and on the appropriateness of such a consultation process:

Children are not competent to judge these matters...it is dangerous to involve children in this kind of comment on their teachers...this is not useful to students and is bad for classroom relationships...there is no validity to this kind of exercise...and... discipline would be adversely affected by this kind of exercise
(*ibid.*, p. 143-144).

It is noteworthy that issues of trust, relationships, respect and power are infused in this commentary from school principals in this early engagement with student voice. These insecurities continue to echo through student voice research.

However, the responses of the students were aligned with other sources of evaluation and showed enough validity to be used as feedback to student teachers. Student engagement with this process was identified in the research as being very positive and improved relationships between students and their teachers emerged as a significant finding (Meighan, 1974, 1977, 1978a, 1978b; Veldman and Peck, 1963, 1969):

Relationships have changed by such an act of consultation...towards a more co-operative relationship, a less deferential relationship or a more conflict-laden relationship
(Meighan, 1974, p. 140).

A special edition of *Educational Review* (1978), edited by Meighan, became the focus for research undertaken using the viewpoint of pupils in schools. This research widened the focus from evaluation of student teachers to using students' commentary on a range of aspects of their experience in schools. This body of research, focused on eliciting student views, represented an early engagement with student voice to provide an insight into students' experience of schooling. Female students revealed their concerns and attitudes towards peer-group relationships and teacher expectations. The research identified a disconnection between the school's expectations of the girls in the relation to achievement and the values of the students' world that centred on friendships and group interactions in the class (Lomax, 1978). Issues of sex stereotyping in subject choice, streaming and teachers' expectations of students were highlighted in interviews with 300 students in another school setting (Davies, 1978), while primary school pupils, when asked about their lessons responded positively in terms of interest and variety while some gender differences were observed in the students' assessment of male and female student teachers (Cortis and Grayson, 1978). A study of students' responses to teacher's commentary on written work revealed a range of attitudes regarding teaching methods of assessment (Wade, 1978). In the context of using student voice, Wade concludes 'if pupils' views, both oral and written, are encouraged, they can also convey useful feedback to the teacher, not replacing his perceptions, but providing additional information' (*ibid.*, p. 158). Notwithstanding the gendered reference to the teacher, this comment

also pointed toward the power and authority issues for the teacher that became the central element of student voice discourse as it developed.

Students as co-researchers, working with their peers and guided by a research team (SooHoo, 1993) represented a further advancement of student voice in pedagogy. Students posed the question...‘what are the obstacles to learning’, and identified issues relating to the pace of the teacher, the absence of a social connection between the students and their teacher, and feelings of being under-valued by teachers. She concluded that young people were indeed ‘worthy of respect and access to decisions made about them and their learning conditions’ (*ibid.*, p. 391).

As one of the first researchers to use the term ‘student voices’, SooHoo began the movement towards schools using student voice as a key internal source for change and improvement arguing that ‘somehow we have forgotten the connection between teachers and students. We listen to outside experts to inform us and consequently we overlook the treasure in our own backyards: our students’ (*ibid.*, p. 390). This point is echoed by Nieto, in the context of school reform, who contends that ‘if we believe schools must provide an equal and quality education for all, students need to be included in the dialogue, and that their views, just as those of others, should be problematised and used to reflect critically on school reform’ (Nieto, 1994, p. 398).

Consultation with students became the clear focus of student voice research in the early nineties in the context of school reform and improved pedagogy in England as it was believed that ‘what pupils say about teaching, learning and schooling...provides an important, perhaps the most important, foundation for thinking about ways of improving schools’ (Rudduck, Chaplin and Wallace, 1996, p.1). This research carried out by Rudduck, *et al.* in 1996 identified, through the voices of the students, the ‘conditions of learning’ in a school or classroom that were viewed as central to students’ engagement and learning. The ‘conditions for learning’ cited included: respect; fairness; autonomy; intellectual challenge; social support; security for students; how resources were allocated; how classes were divided and labelled; timetable allocation; how teachers communicated expectations; and how rewards or punishments were administered. Relationships were identified as being critical to how students engaged and participated and the respect and challenge created by teachers in the classroom were central to good teaching (*ibid.*). The centrality and importance of relationships with teachers echoes across student voice research and is reflected in this research study as will be outlined in the unfolding drama of Chapter Six.

During the decade from 2001, a wide range of research, mainly in the UK, USA, and Australia engaged directly with students and with school communities to explore the dynamics of student voice in relation to student engagement, agency, identity, learning, school reform and the potential

to transform school culture. The value of listening to students and consulting with them to understand their experience and perspectives of classrooms and schools became the central focus for student voice in school improvement (Rudduck, 2003; Rudduck and Flutter, 2000, 2004b). Student voice research at this time also provided advocacy for the value for schools to engage with their own students to address student disengagement (Rudduck, Brown and Hendy, 2006), to provide insights for school improvement (Rudduck and Flutter, 2004b) and to embed personalised learning (Rudduck, 2006).

Guidance documents arising from these research projects identified four approaches to elicit student views that included talking with students, students' writing, students' drawing, and enacting particular situations by students (MacBeath, Demetriou, Rudduck and Myers, 2003). However, this guidance for schools and teachers, echoing Shultz (2009), identified the need for a conceptual language shared by students and teachers. In addition, issues relating to methodology, location and the variables of age, gender and students' trust and confidence to voice their views emerged as significant factors with which schools needed to engage to facilitate student voice initiatives.

A number of major English studies advocated for engagement with student voice in schools. They identified sustained and structured consultation with students as providing schools with a practical agenda for change, a method of strengthening students' self-esteem, transforming pedagogical practices, improving relationships between students and teachers and creating a greater commitment to learning (Arnot, McIntyre, Pedder and Reay, 2004; Rudduck, 2006; Rudduck and Flutter, 2004b).

Among the range of student voice research projects, engaging students in participatory action research relating to decision-making at classroom and school level was found to strengthen students' active citizenship and ability to take on responsibility while both teachers' identity and students' agency were challenged and transformed (Kirby, 2001). Student voice in the form of one-to-one dialogue enhanced students' learning, promoted self-esteem and developed action-planning skills for disadvantaged students (Bullock and Wikeley, 2001). Increased student engagement in school and in learning due to involvement in school self-evaluation, and the identification by students of tokenistic change agendas, were two clear but differing outcomes of one extensive research project (MacBeath and Sugimine, 2003).

A study on student voice in pedagogy used engagement with tutor-group discussions, questionnaires, learning logs, and interviews with students as potential methods to engage with student voice in eight schools. The study generated detailed commentary about pedagogy relating

to feedback, target setting, mentoring and rewards (Rudduck, Brown and Hendy, 2006). Commentary on classroom experiences included positive commentary on practical experiences including, sharing ideas, whole-class interaction, discussion and group work, and ‘fun’ as the characteristics of lessons that engaged students. A key finding outlined that:

Students appreciate it when their interests, rather than just the school's, guide what happens, and when they feel that the school, through the teachers, is prepared to hear what they have to say about learning.

(ibid., p. 13).

Requesting students to describe and evaluate their experience of a lesson was another strategy for student voice in pedagogy that successfully addressed the challenge of engaging students from disadvantaged schools in an attempt to increase achievement and improve behaviour (Whitehead and Clough, 2004), while utilising students as both consultants and researchers in a deeper engagement to evaluate how students were served by their school highlighted the contrasts between assumptions held about the school by teachers and school management, and the lived reality for the students. Gunter and Thomson, (2006, 2007) highlighted the privileging of some voices in the schools and questioned the existence and authenticity of a singular student voice.

In another study, consultation with students in primary school highlighted peer-group cultures and gave an insight into the complexity of student relationships in the classroom that challenged fairness, collegiality and the sense of community (Reay, 2006). Attempts to engage students in commentary on school life through dialogue and consultation exposed the complexity of the challenge for teachers, their resistance to change and the need for a collective response at school level. The dialogue provided an insight into the importance of scaffolding student voice initiatives and the fundamental importance of relationships based on trust and respect (Bragg, 2007b).

The value of collaboration and dialogue with students emerged from another study that used students rather than staff to address levels of engagement, to develop new skills and provide the opportunity to work with peers. However, issues of privileging, collaboration with teachers and both the selection and the representative nature of the research group emerged from the participants (Morgan and Porter, 2011).

The Irish context

In the Irish educational context, the absence of students and their voices from the emerging partnership model in education (Trant and Ó Donnabháin, 1998) in advance of the Education Act (1998) is noteworthy in the context of positioning student voice in Irish educational discourse.

While students were excluded, partnership with students was viewed as a significant challenge for educational change processes during that period.

A genuine partnership with students will mean encouraging them to take a critical look at the process of education itself...or...are we reluctant to open Pandora's Box - afraid that the students will see through the various strategies and hypocrisies that often pervade the educational rhetoric that we use

(Trant and Ó Donnabháin, 1998, p. 81).

Since that time, a significant body of research using the voices of students from a range of school types has highlighted a subordinated student identity in Irish primary and post-primary schools. The students' experience was identified as being controlled by a teacher-centred curriculum and a hierarchical school structure lacking in any consultation with students or engagement with their voice (Devine 2001, 2003a, 2004, 2009; Lynch and Lodge, 2002). Research using the voices of primary school students to understand their experiences of school identified students as passive participants in a culture where the commitment to their care was very significant but there was no appreciation of any need to consult or engage with them about their experiences in school (Devine 2003a, 2004). A sense of otherness emerged through the expression of care and control that undermined the child's capacities for discussion, reflection and challenge. Teachers through the curriculum, rules and timetable expressed the need for order and control, and the fear of disorder was used to justify the absence of consultation or any role for students in decision-making. A change in the structure of schools and classrooms, and in the agency and the position of students to allow them to be viewed as citizens, learning through dialogue as co-participants with a voice that is heard, was recommended (Devine, 2003a, 2004).

This theme of subordination also emerged in a study of equality and power, based in twelve Irish post-primary schools. These students raised issues of respect, power and the exercise of authority, and up to half of the students signalled concern at how they were respected as young people in their schools (Lynch and Lodge, 2002). Improved respect and increased democratic participation were the key requests from students. Senior students particularly 'wanted their opinions taken seriously; they wanted to be involved in decisions that affect them' (*ibid.*, p. 156). Key among the findings that emerged from the voices of these students was their concern at their lack of power and authority. They looked towards increased and improved democratic participation in their schools 'both at organisational and classroom level' (*ibid.*, p. 165).

Research engaging the voices of marginalised students and those with special education needs in Ireland provided strong advocacy for engaging with students to understand their needs and to avoid either tokenistic or overly benevolent strategies that can lead to a culture of dependence and limit students' capacities to engage in the world outside of their school (Shevlin and Rose, 2003).

Agency for students from marginalised groups in schools was seen as a problematic that needed to be addressed as ‘schools may be seduced into creating a protected artificial world for their young people who are viewed as different...these young people can remain unchallenged and passive observers of the real world’ (*ibid.*, p. 297).

Strong advocacy emerges from this ongoing research for deeper engagement with the voices of marginalised students. The development of positive identities for these students based on individualised learning and achievement through shared discussion and decision-making on learning profiles and plans, were among the key findings (Rose and Shevlin, 2010).

Strategies to develop empowerment, responsibility, choice, reflection and affirmation provided opportunities to find this voice...reconceptualising the learning environment means that educators can provide opportunities for students to become contributors, problem solvers and partners

(*ibid.*, p. 99).

Related research concerning students with emotional and behavioural difficulties emphasised the importance of an approach from the perspective of the voices of the students but equally support and reaction from school leadership since ‘just as the provision of opportunities to ‘voice’ requires an authentic ‘listening’ forum, a bottom-up approach equally requires a ‘top-down’ response’ (Shevlin, Lodge and Flynn, 2012, p. 29).

Students’ voices engaged through participatory action research were used by their teacher to negotiate the content of a Physical Education (PE) curriculum for the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme in an inner city post-primary school (Enright and O’Sullivan, 2010). Senior students were facilitated to negotiate the content of the programme in an attempt to assess increased engagement and participation. Student voice as expressed through participatory action research was found to engage students in physical activities, to assist in skills development and, as a result of the negotiation, the PE activities chosen became more relevant to the students’ lives (Enright and O’Sullivan, 2008, 2010, 2012).

International student voice research

Mitra (2001, 2003, 2004, 2007) has produced a body of research in the USA addressing the problem of failing and marginalised students through consultation and facilitating schools and teachers to listen to the voices of their students. Asking students what schools can do to improve, how they (the students) best learn, and why they believe they were unsuccessful, drew a wide range of responses that highlighted issues of motivation, respect and cultural distance between students and teachers in case-study schools that experienced significant disengagement and drop-

out by students. Other student voice initiatives in the USA engaged students in dialogue in middle schools to identify perspectives on stress, homework, testing policies and teachers' interaction with students. The dialogue established a link between school climate, motivation to engage in learning, and student well-being (Galloway, Pope and Osberg, 2007).

The need for rigorous high quality teaching reflecting high expectations for students, and for teaching and learning combined with a personalised approach to the diverse needs of students were the significant findings in a student voice research project designed to guide school reform in one school district in the USA involving students from fifteen high schools (Yonezawa and Jones, 2007). Similarly, youth projects in the USA looking to engage students in educational policy development in disadvantaged school districts highlighted the students' desire for respect, for belonging to school, and a rigorous approach from their teachers in relation to pedagogy, challenge and expectations in classrooms (Fine, Torre, Burns and Payne, 2007). African American and Hispanic middle-school students from low-income school districts in the USA, responding to questions relating to the characteristics of good teaching, identified practices that accepted no excuses for failing to complete assignments, that could control poor behaviour, that gave detailed attention to individuals, provided a variety of activities and took account of individual needs. Having completed the consultation, the students recognised the value of reforms based on their own ideas and consequently were found to engage with the changes that resulted (Wilson and Corbett, 2007).

An ambitious decade-long, state-wide student voice project in Manitoba, Canada, (The Manitoba Schools Project), developed five student voice actions for schools as outcomes from the project: students should be active participants in data collection; students should network with other schools to develop skills and experience with student voice; students should advocate for democratic processes and policy development; students should act as researchers using action research projects with feedback to the school community; and student advisors should sit on school committees (Pekrul and Levin, 2007).

Another international study in Southern Africa used 'photo voice', a student's commentary on their own photographs to illustrate their understanding of HIV issues. These commentaries were combined with student-produced short video documentaries and focus-group discussions as methods to develop and advance a context-based curriculum for sexuality education (McLaughlin and Kiragu, 2011).

Dialogue with students at the point of dropping out of an Australian school resulted in the presentation of a framework for a 'pedagogically engaged school' that referenced a school culture

that promoted student voice through dialogue, pedagogies that engaged with the life experiences of the students, and a school structure based on democratic dialogue and discussion (Smyth, 2007). Another Australian study provided the view of the ‘insider’ on student disengagement from school. Students working as researchers with teachers and university personnel revealed very negative findings relating to racism and exclusion in the schools (Bland, 2011).

A number of Swedish schools focused on a hierarchy of student voice activities ranging from listening to students’ perspectives, to their involvement in democratic decision-making. The schools attempted to empower students through meetings and through actions to address individual issues (Bergmark and Kostenius, 2011).

Initial engagement with student voice in China used consultation with a small number of students to address teaching methods that focused on rote learning, and examined the potential impact of enquiry-based learning. It was found that students working as co-researchers in three high schools achieved little change due to an established school culture aimed primarily at students’ meeting the competitive requirements of entry to third-level education. Resistance from teachers and the challenge of traditional student-teacher identities and roles were revealed as significant challenges to a system that had no tradition or experience of student voice (Kan, 2011).

Using student voice to develop political awareness as a means of social transformation was a particular focus of research by the Brazilian Landless Movement. Reform of pedagogy and curriculum in schools was focused on radical democracy with the direct participation of students. Prefigurative democratic practice reflected students’ active involvement with class councils that met on a twice-monthly basis with the principal and deputy to discuss classroom issues and to participate in school decision-making (McCowan, 2011).

Student voice research has also expanded to engage with new media and new areas and settings of student experience including special schools, further education and third-level education. One such initiative used students as consultants with teachers on school building design in England by involving students in dialogue with architects (Flutter, 2006). Consultation on urban regeneration in advance of the London 2012 Olympics used student’s art to gain insights into their vision for the future shape of their community (Kenworthy, 2011). Student voice using *twitter* and other social media was used as a method to support and improve students’ writing and literacy, including digital literacy development (Waller, 2011). ‘E-mentoring’ between students was one of three strategies introduced in a UK secondary school to facilitate the school to engage in self-review (Samways and Seal, 2011), while a collaborative case study between a university and school used

students' insights and experiences to raise student achievement and transfer to third level (McLellan, Kirkman, Cartwright and Millington, 2011).

Photographs taken by students of what they liked and disliked, diamond ranking of these and interviews using puppets as symbol cues were the methods used to engage with student voice in a special school setting in the UK (Bishton and Lindsay, 2011). Using student voice to inform 'service delivery' in a further education college in the UK focused on empowerment and partnership with students to engage in a cycle of co-operation, consultation and feedback leading to improved outcomes for students (Wainer and Islam, 2011). A range of universities in the UK engaged with the collective voice of students using questionnaires, staff-student consultative committees, and with individual voices through personal narratives. The studies identified the need to avoid tokenistic consultation, and the need for sustainability, and meaningful and recognisable responses to students' commentary, as significant challenges for student voice in third-level education (Baldry Currens, 2011).

An overview of student voice research

The body of research cited firmly advocates for student voice in pedagogy, in school reform and for improvement across the education system. From the early engagement with 'pupil's viewpoint' on student teachers (Veldman and Peck, 1963, 1969) in the USA, through Meighan's navigation of 'pupils' perspectives' in the UK (Meighan, 1974, 1978), the much cited work of SooHoo and Nieto to invoke 'student voices' (Nieto, 1994; SooHoo, 1993) and onwards through Rudduck's sustained advocacy of student voice culminating in *'Pupil voice is here to stay'* (Rudduck, 2005), it is clear that student voice as a concept has found a significant place in English schools. The UNCRC (1992) and other consequent national legislative and policy initiatives, particularly in the UK, have combined to embed the concept of student voice in schools. Both the rights-based and education for democracy and citizenship motivations for student voice seem to complement the pedagogical advantages to students, teachers and schools identified in student voice research. An overview identifies levels of engagement with the voices of students on a hierarchical scale from listening to students at the lowest level to a deep engagement with students as researchers in the co-construction of pedagogy and school improvement. The body of international research outlines key commonalities associated with student voice including improved relationships and respect in schools and classrooms, increased student engagement in learning, positive classroom and school climate, improvements in pedagogy and the inclusion and re-engagement of marginalised students. Issues including: the complexity and contextual nature of student voice; authenticity; representation; silent, silenced and privileged voices; the motivation for engaging with student

voice; and the challenge to established identities and power hierarchies in schools and classroom are aspects of student voice that are identified, contested and problematised in the research.

In Ireland, the work of Devine, Lynch and Lodge, Shevlin and Rose, Enright and O’Sullivan, and Smyth has been the focus of student voice research that was particularly concerned with students’ experience of the education system at both primary and post-primary levels. Their research used the voices to gain insights into relationships, participation in decision-making and the influence of power, authority and constructs on students’ experiences and their navigation of the education system. The importance and impact of student voice on the experiences of marginalised students and in planning by schools to meet the needs of students with special educational needs was identified. However, it is the recent work of Enright and O’Sullivan that for the first time situates student voice in the classroom focusing on the experience of a negotiated PE curriculum on the participation and engagement of senior cycle teenage girls.

Student voice as transformative of school culture

Advocates for student voice have recognised the increased engagement and participation of students in schools and classrooms and the transformative impacts of consulting with students and engaging with their voices. Through the affordance of student voice, students have offered meaningful insights and pointed clearly to areas of experience and concern. Student voice research indicates increased feelings of belonging and inclusion, improved relationships and classroom climate and improved trust and respect between students and their teachers, which accrue from such an affordance. Similarly, student voice has contributed to school reform and change processes in classroom and school culture and structure.

Notwithstanding these positive outcomes from the research outlined, direct linkage between student voice and improved student achievement and learning is limited. Cook-Sather and Mitra have identified the association between student voice and capacity and commitment to learning in their research. Cook-Sather, for example recognised increased commitment and positive attitudes towards school and learning since ‘consulting students enhances student commitment and capacity for learning through strengthening self-esteem, enhancing attitudes toward school and learning, developing a stronger sense of membership, developing new skills for learning’ (Cook-Sather, 2009, p. 176).

Similarly, Mitra identified positive effects on the engagement related to achievement for marginalised students in the context of their sense of being valued and respected by teachers and school management stating that ‘when students believe that they are valued for their perspectives

and respected, they begin to develop a sense of ownership and attachment...[that]...is positively related to academic success and motivation' (Mitra, 2004, p. 669).

Wainer and Islam (2011) present an idealised student voice environment that is characterised by student dialogue and partnership with teachers to provide insights that can improve classroom experiences, learning and the work of the whole school. They conceptualised this classroom environment as 'a virtuous circle [where students] have a sense of involvement, ownership and empowerment which is fed into their lessons, leading to more effective and motivated staff, better lessons and better results' (*ibid.*, p. 164,)

Such an idealised image of student voice in a transformed classroom setting has been critiqued since the earliest engagement with student voice. This 'virtuous circle' suggests transformation of school culture, empowerment of students, communication, inclusion and partnership based on equality and inclusion. When deconstructed and problematised however, it is argued that this envisioning is intersected by power relationships. Students are co-operative, but their participation is largely passive in the context of 'feeding back to staff', 'seeing the impact of their feedback' and having 'a sense of involvement'. 'Staff' is in power: controlling the consultation; controlling provision; controlling the 'sense of involvement,' and in control of the outcomes as 'better lessons and better results' (*ibid.*). Such a critique poses a number of questions: it questions the depth of engagement, the complexity of voice and the motivation to engage with student voice in the first instance.

The depth of student voice

Depth of student voice engagement can be viewed on a scale that sees students completing standardised questionnaires to provide data for schools, to a position where students engage in research to co-construct teaching and learning. Moving beyond listening to students and other simplistic levels of consultation and data gathering, sequential levels of participation can be identified to measure the depth of engagement of students in decision-making (Hart, 1992). While the lower levels are characterised by non-participation and tokenism, at the higher levels young people have a shared role with adults in decision-making (*ibid.*). A typology involving a five-point ascending scale presents another model focused more particularly on student voice outlining positions ranging from the absence of any engagement with students to a level that positions students as fully active participants and co-researchers with teachers (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004). A further four-part hierarchical typology focusing on the depth and effectiveness of student voice uses a scale that places students as a data source at the lowest level to positioning them as researchers in schools at the highest (Fielding and McGregor, 2005). The transformative potential

of student voice initiatives rests in the first instance on the depth of engagement that can be gauged by these typologies.

Listening to students and facilitating their commentary and voice about matters that affect them is fundamental to student voice. Student voice researchers have listened to the voice of the child (Lodge, 2005; Rose and Shevlin, 2010) and used their voices to gain an insight into areas of their lives in schools whether pedagogical (Nieto, 1994; Rudduck, 2002, 2006, 2007; Rudduck, Chaplin and Wallace, 1996; SooHoo, 1993) or in the social and personal domain relating to peer groups, relationships and the effects of class, race and gender and experiences in schools (Arnot and Reay, 2007; Bragg 2001, 2007b; Devine, 2003a; Lynch and Lodge, 2002; Mitra, 2004; Reay, 2006).

While external researchers have demonstrated the positive impact of gathering the perspectives of students, student voice advocates, in line with education policy-makers in many countries have attempted to embed student voice in school culture from within by highlighting its benefits in terms of relationships, pedagogy, school climate, engagement and agency for students. In equal measure they have attempted to allay fears and insecurities particularly among teachers (Devine, 2003a; Nieto, 1994; Rudduck, 2005).

Thus, depth of student voice extends from listening to students, to consultation with them and developing on-going dialogue between students and adults in a school (Burke, 2007; Lodge, 2005, 2008; Rudduck, Chaplin and Wallace, 1996). So engaging with student voice needs to be 'more than a conversation but the building of a shared dialogue' (Lodge, 2005, p. 134).

Given the traditional silent positioning of students, viewing student voice in the context of 'dialogue and radical collegiality' (Fielding, 1999) represents a depth of engagement that has the potential to be transformative and to change school culture and its power and authority discourse. In an argument similar to Lundy (2007), Cook-Sather (2002) however, argues that these potential changes are conditioned by the structures to support dialogue, by the representative nature of these structures and by the frequency, location, visibility and intensity of actions. Dialogue, whether radical, collegial, shared or critical, represented a higher level of engagement with students based on the typologies presented. However, whether dialogue can facilitate interventions that reach the transformative potential of students as researchers (Fielding and McGregor, 2005), or students as shared decision-makers (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004; Hart, 1997), is questionable.

Deep student voice characterised by dialogue can be transformative of relationships in school and classroom settings. Students' agency that arises from consultation and dialogue reflects 'being

treated with dignity, respect and mutuality’ (Thomson, 2007, p. 375). The centrality of relationships, trust and mutual respect arising from dialogue emerges across student voice research cited as a universal and transformative outcome. This respect and trust can be seen to translate into greater engagement by students, the inclusion and retention of marginalised students, and improved commitment to learning (Cook-Sather, 2002; Mitra, 2004; Smyth 2007; Wilson and Corbett, 2007). However, notwithstanding arguments relating to the effect and impact of the varying depths of engagement with student voice, a more significant and challenging development in the evolution of student voice practice concerns the motivation of education policy makers and schools in engaging with the voices of their students.

Student voice – a critique of motivation

The body of research cited points to a theorisation of student voice as an emancipatory, democratic and rights-based project having significant advantages for pedagogy and students’ engagement and participation in schools and classrooms. A key challenge to this positioning and theorisation argues that student voice is little more than a tokenistic consultation and engagement with students to inform school performance, to comply with legislative, policy, and inspection requirements, and to maintain hierarchical power and control structures in schools (Arnot and Reay, 2007; Bragg, 2007b, 2007c; Fielding, 1997, 2004b, 2011; Gunther and Thomson, 2006, 2007).

Student voice had been operationalised in schools, particularly in England, as a consultative and dialogic process normally using questionnaires, focus groups discussions or interviews either at whole-school and classroom level, or with individual students. Student focus groups and school councils have also been used to represent the views of students in an attempt to create a democratic and dialogic school culture. The rationale for these constructs ostensibly has been a desire to implement changes and improvements reflecting democratic principles. Proposals are presented by a representative group of students, and then listened-to and acted-upon by teachers and school management. Nevertheless, following the initial energy, enthusiasm and advocacy for student voice, a significant group of researchers is arguing that while student voice in the context of a student or school council is characterised by ‘dialogue and radical collegiality’ (Fielding, 1999) leading to change in both structure and culture, the lived experience of these constructs for students is often characterised by tokenism since ‘if the school is not ready for pupil participation then a school council can become...an exercise in damage limitation rather than an opportunity for constructive consultation’ (Rudduck and Flutter, 2000, p. 83)

Rudduck *et al.* (*ibid.*) contend that the potential for 'school-wide democratic practice' as a foundation for genuine student voice at school council level has been challenged by a neo-liberalist agenda. However, the challenge and contestation is wider than the student council construct. Fielding has argued strongly and persistently that a school performance agenda as represented by a high-performance model of schooling is only concerned with measuring individual student performance rather than a 'communally situated' (Fielding, 2011, p. 6) emphasis on the individual. Therefore, although a neo-liberal perspective viewed student voice as consultative, it is argued that the central emphasis is on improving students' and schools' performance within an individualistic standards-driven and school-effectiveness culture as opposed to an ethos directed at the benefit of all groups including the silent, the marginalised and the disengaged (Bragg, 2007b, 2007c).

In this context, despite its emancipatory and democratic appeal, critical researchers continue to argue that student voice has been used to simply provide data to schools on students' attitudes, achievement and output. Within this frame, teachers and school leaders continue to occupy traditional positions of power, directing a market and consumer-orientated school culture, driven by externally imposed education policy. This position, focusing mainly on the direction of student voice in the UK and the USA is reflected widely in the work of researchers in this field. (Arnot and Reay, 2007; Bragg, 2007b, 2007c; Bragg and Manchester, 2011; Cheminais, 2011; Czerniawski and Kidd, 2011; Fielding, 1997, 2001a, 2004b, 2007, 2011; Gunter and Thomson, 2006, 2007; Lodge, 2005, 2008; Mitra, Frick and Crawford, 2011; Pope and Joslin, 2011; Rudduck, 2002, 2006; Streeting, 2011; Wisby, 2011). From these perspectives, the overall motivation and democratic aspirations of student voice initiatives are therefore challenged and contested. Fielding offers an apt summary of this perspective when he asks whether 'the conversations with students [are] focused around an instrumental agenda, drawn up by the teacher to serve short-term school goals that have their real origin in the market place?' (Fielding, 1997, p. 22)

Standards and OFSTED

The beginning of this redirection of emphasis and motivation for student voice was identified as the policy decision to include student voice in the inspection framework for schools by the English inspectorate, the Office of Standards in Education (OFSTED), from as early as 1992. While initially welcomed as giving further recognition to the voice of students (Rudduck, Chaplin and Wallace, 1996), this was later challenged in the context of subverting student voice to become a tool of school improvement through inspection since 'if consultation is captured as part of an inspection process, then what pupils say may be used as evidence about teachers in the context of inspections...instead of feeding into a dialogue with teachers about teaching and learning' (Rudduck, 2002, p. 135).

It is argued that such a redirection of the motivation for student voice from providing a context for dialogue between teachers and students relating to teaching and learning towards performativity and improved standards and measurable outcomes for students has resulted in students being used 'to serve the narrow ends of a grades-obsessed society rather than 'empowering' them by offering them greater agency in their schools' (Rudduck and Flutter, 2000, p. 82).

Policy developments relating to school self-evaluation in England also incorporated student voice. This arguably further advanced the redirection of student voice as a tool or strategy for school improvement in a culture of performance and measurable outcomes. The motivation of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) in England focuses on the need for 'an ethos of self-evaluation within education and more formal evaluation of teaching practice with input from pupils and students' (Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin and Sinclair, 2003, p. 125).

Ofsted's guidelines for inspection (OFSTED, 2005b) outlined their demand for a comprehensive student voice in pedagogy and at whole-school level. Questionnaires and focus groups were then introduced to gather student and parent views (OFSTED, 2006b) which was followed by the requirement on schools to complete a self-evaluation form and to demonstrate to inspectors how consultation with students was used to improve teaching and learning in the school (OFSTED, 2010).

This policy discourse relating to standards, accountability, external evaluative measures and a neo-liberal agenda has been challenged by student voice advocates and by those who have critiqued its development throughout this period in the UK and in the USA. Bragg, for example points to the 'norms of individualism, self-reliance and self-management, which resonate with new configurations of power and authority under neo-liberalism, respond to specific debates about school standards, effectiveness and competition, and help construct young people as reflexive 'knowledge workers'' (Bragg, 2007c, p. 343). This agenda has eclipsed the potential for student voice as a democratic rights-based and person-centred project from which increased student motivation and participation, and improved learning has been seen to accrue.

Student voice as an instrument of control

Student voice advocates argue strongly that the systematic emphasis on school performance, standards and personalisation in education in the UK (DfES 2004c, Hargreaves, 2004), represent a neo-liberal, economic model of schooling and education informed by accountability, consumerism,

and external performance criteria. These values are seen to challenge person-centred education that should inform teacher-student-classroom relationships (Fielding, 2007, 2011). Student voice in this culture is therefore compromised and viewed as an instrument of management, control and power that lacks any sharing of responsibility with students or transformative potential to move students from silence to influence in a school or classroom learning community (Rudduck 2002) or towards any ‘democratic fellowship’ (Fielding, 2010, p. 15).

This neo-liberal perspective is further critiqued in the context of the positioning of power in schools relating to student voice initiatives. Bragg (2007c) used Foucault’s concept of governmentality as a lens to view neo-liberalism as embedding the concept of individual achievement rather than aspirations towards the common good informed by a democratic school ethos. However, he argued that this created a new locus of power and authority external to the school in the context of competition and the achievement of standards. Bragg also envisioned student voice as producing a new power base represented by the student body within the school. However, rather than freeing students by shifting the balance of power from its traditional hierarchy to a more democratic structure through developing a student voice, she argued that students were simply conforming to a wider power structure based on collective performativity (*ibid.*).

It is of significance that student voice developments in high schools in the USA experienced a significant decline following the external demands for performativity and accountability imposed by the ‘No Child Left Behind’ (2002) federal education policy that introduced standardised testing for all students (Mitra, 2009). In England there is clear contestation relating to the impact of similar policies on student voice. Following the enactment of the Education Acts of 2002 and 2004, the policy initiative ‘Every Child Matters (DfES, 2004a) had, as one of its five pillars, the facilitation of young people to...’make a positive contribution’ (*ibid.*, p. 9) which outlined strategies to encourage the development of school councils, school forums and student questionnaires. Schools were required to consult with students about decisions that affected them. Streeting (2011) argues that this educational agenda of the Labour government between 1997 and 2010 aligned student voice and consumerism to a position where:

Student voice and student consumerism are the same thing...a reductive vision of the education system where students go to be certified rather than educated and the process is a commodity to be bought and sold in the market place.

(Streeting, 2011, p. 2).

Cheminais (2011) arguing from a more moderate stance outlines that without the implementation of ‘Every Child Matters’ by the Labour Government, student voice would not have the current

visibility in schools, notwithstanding its contestation as a neo-liberal policy agenda. However, the shifting educational policy focus of the 2010 Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government in the UK, away from care and support structures and almost exclusively towards school achievement and academic attainment will continue the questioning of the motivation and outcome for student voice (Streeting, 2011).

A more positive analysis of these impositions of policy, control and accountability discourses views interaction, consultation and dialogue with students as having the potential to challenge the power hierarchy within the school (Arnot and Reay, 2007). While power structures and authority limit the possibilities for change, over time new student, teacher and management relationships could emerge, and silent, reluctant and less conformist voices may be heard. Hence, the gradual achievement of establishing student voice in schools could incrementally change the power dynamic in such schools (*ibid.*) and the power of teacher professional autonomy in the classroom and the centralised power of school management could also be challenged and re-directed incrementally towards collaboration and dialogue (Wisby, 2011).

Student voice as a challenge to a neo-liberal agenda

Fielding spearheaded a robust alternative view that contests this neo-liberal accountability, individualism and performativity model arguing strongly that student voice should be viewed in the context of a transformative framework for school culture that can accommodate a school improvement agenda but remain student and person-centred (Fielding, 1996, 1997, 2010, 2011). This requires a shift in emphasis from a school improvement agenda for schools to one based on transformative education focusing on the development of the person rather than giving primacy to school processes. This argument centres on ‘emancipatory educational commitments and seeks both to reclaim and develop a language which rejects the reductionist commodification of education’ (Fielding 1997, p. 22).

This argument reflected a wish for a climate of participatory democracy in schools to counter the neo-liberal market and consumer-driven school characterised by measurable outcomes (Fielding, 2011). A ‘pedagogically engaged school’ (Smyth, J. 2007) represents another envisioning of a school community that has students’ learning, student voice, dialogue and pedagogy as its core rather than being dominated by external agendas. This idealised setting values and promotes students’ ownership of learning, student voice, active involvement through dialogue, and pedagogy that engages the diversity of students in decision-making within a democratic culture (*ibid.*). Such contestation of student voice in relation to education policy continues to date and arguably is about

to emerge in the Irish context following the Inspectorate's introduction of school self-evaluation for primary and post-primary schools in 2012.

Concluding voices

Student voice research identifies students' search for respect, high quality teaching, high expectations, challenge in their experience of schools and classrooms, and offers substantial evidence of increased and improved engagement with learning once students are consulted and engaged in co-construction or co-research. Student voice research further points to successes in addressing disengagement and re-engaging students.

Issues and contestations arising from the research literature refer to the complexity and context of student voice, the authenticity and representative nature of that voice, the issue of silent, silenced and privileged voices and the challenge to established identities and power hierarchies in schools and classrooms.

The central challenges for student voice to date point to motivation, depth of engagement and the complexity of the concept of student voice. At a macro level, motivation emerges both from a rights-based and a democratic, active-citizenship agenda but this has been subverted by the imposition of neo-liberal economic models in education policy. At a micro level, the benefits of student voice to students are clear, but its navigation within a school culture with embedded power and authority hierarchies and against a backdrop of the demands of performativity and accountability are significant questions and add further complexity to the concept. The on going contested and problematised issue for student voice, it is argued, is its positioning as a tokenistic instrument of market-driven accountability and control or as a democratic design for living and learning, arising from schools, and based on the principles of equality, freedom and mutual respect.

Chapter 4 – Student council as student voice: from policy to research

Student councils give students a voice but not a say

(Democracy Commission, 2005, p. 33)

Introduction to student voice policy in Ireland

AS IN THE other jurisdictions already discussed in Chapter Three, the concept of student voice emerged in the Irish educational policy discourse following the ratification of the UN Charter on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1992. Article 12 forms the basis for policy development relating to participation and consultation with children in relation to matters that might affect them. In educational policy in Ireland, the ‘actioning’ of the requirements of the UNCRC article 12 has resulted primarily in the formation of student councils in post-primary schools.

The aforementioned period of partnership in policy development that emerged in Irish education (Devine, 2004; Granville, 2004; Trant and Ó Donnabháin, 1998) reached an important focus in the National Education Convention in 1994. The convention, which involved all education stakeholders, with the exception of student representatives, resulted in the drafting of the White Paper on Education (1995) and subsequently the Education Act (1998). The report of the convention made very limited reference to any role for students in decision-making or school governance. It did however make reference to the desirability of ‘a shared dialogue on the core values of the school, embracing the patron, trustees, board, principal, staff, parents and students’ (National Education Convention Secretariat, 1994, p. 28).

The role of students in policy development and decision-making has changed since then, albeit slowly and the growing awareness of the necessity and desirability to listen to the voices of students has emerged. This shift in the perception of children as immature beings who are incapable of trust and responsibility (Devine, 2004) to one of active engaged citizens is reflected in a gradual change in the policy discourse from a position of student access and need within education to that of students’ rights and participation in their education in Ireland (*ibid.*).

The White Paper on Education in 1995 was first to mention the student council in policy as a mechanism for student participation in schools:

Likewise, school policies should be developed in close consultation with parents, and with students where appropriate. In order to facilitate this

consultation, the board of management of each second-level school will be encouraged to promote the formation of a students' council, which will work in collaboration with the staff and the parents' association

(Government of Ireland, 1995, p. 181).

Student voice, envisioned as a consultative role, was positioned in policy for the first time by this single reference. The role was envisioned as one of consultation on school planning within a structure that was promoted by the board of management. While the conditionality of ‘where appropriate’ was used, and both control and power were vested with the board of management, this represented an aspiration for meaningful involvement of students (and parents) in a significant aspect of the work of the school. These involvements were structured within the establishment of student councils in schools.

Student voice and the Education Act (1998)

The Education Act (1998) which emerged from the work of the National Education Convention (1994) and the White Paper in Education (1995) set out, for the first time, the function and role of the school’s board of management, the principal and teachers. The act situated the board of management as central to school governance and outlined in detail the interrelated roles and responsibilities of the school principal. It made first mention of a role for students in its outline of the functions of the school principal. This role was envisaged as consultation in relation to school objectives as ‘under the direction of the board and, in consultation with the teachers, the parents and, to the extent appropriate to their age and experience, the students, set objectives for the school and monitor the achievement of those objectives’ (Education Act, 1998, 23:2).

While students were mentioned in the context of consultation appropriate to their age and experience, the imbalance in favour of the roles for parents, teachers and staff in following subsections was obvious, as the principal shall ‘encourage the involvement of parents of students in the school in the education of those students and in the achievement of the objectives of the school’ (*ibid.*, 23:2), and ‘wherever practicable, the principal shall, in exercising his or her functions under this section, consult with teachers and other staff of the school’ (*ibid.*, 23:6).

Mention of students was excluded from this consultation. A role for students in the school received further attention however, in reference to communication with students, their involvement in the school, and the establishment of a student council:

A board shall establish and maintain procedures for the purposes of informing students in a school of the activities of the school

(*ibid.*, 27:1)

and the board:

Shall facilitate the involvement of the students in the operation of the school, having regard to the age and experience of the students, in association with their parents and teachers

(ibid., 27:1).

The establishment and maintenance of these procedures was not outlined or developed in the act although the establishment of a student council was given more attention:

Students of a post-primary school may establish a student council (ibid., 27:3).

Nevertheless, though the act provided for the establishment of a council, it was made clear that such a council was not obligatory, and therefore it ‘may’ rather than ‘should’ or ‘shall’ be established. The function of the council was outlined as ‘a student council shall promote the interests of the school and the involvement of students in the affairs of the school’ (*ibid.*, 27:3).

This section of the act represents the key defining reference to student voice in the policy discourse in Ireland at this time and has defined developments, specifically in relation to the role of the council in the school, to date. It placed promotion of the interests of the school as a primary function of the council, followed by the secondary role of ‘involvement of students in the affairs of the school’. This represented a significant reduction in the role of the council from that of consultation on policy development as envisaged in the White Paper (1995) and reflected a very limited role in decision-making. The act was not specific on how involvement in the affairs of the schools might be structured or operationalised. Clearly, power and control of the council was vested in the board of management as ‘the rules for the establishment of a student council shall be drawn up by the board’ (Education Act, 1998, 27:4).

It is noteworthy that the act did envision, however vaguely, that students would have an involvement in the affairs of the school. The detail of this involvement was not outlined in the act and has never been fully developed at a statutory level. It is equally noteworthy that the act also introduced a subtle change in the written form of the term ‘student council’. The plural apostrophe in ‘students’ council’, as used in the White Paper, had been changed in the text of the act to the use of the term ‘student council’ without the plural apostrophe. This, arguably, changed the meaning of the term from a council representing all the students and belonging to the students, to simply a council of students.

Student voice and active citizenship

In parallel to educational initiatives, the National Children’s Strategy (2000) was the key national strategic document that was developed in response to the requirements of ratification of the

UNCRC by Ireland in 1992. It represented ‘a major initiative to progress the implementation of the convention’ (National Children’s Strategy, 2000, p. 6) and set out a vision based on democratic citizenship and participation for ‘an Ireland where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own’ (*ibid.*, p. 4). The strategy thus outlined three national goals, that:

Children will have a voice; children’s lives will be better understood; and children will receive quality supports and services

(*ibid.*, p. 11).

In both vision and goals, the strategy included clear references to young people having a voice and to being heard. The national goal that referenced voice was operationalised through an emphasis on active citizenship in the creation of a representative regional youth parliament structure referred to as ‘Dáil na nÓg’ and ‘Comháirle na nÓg’. These provided a forum for youth groups and student councils to discuss issues of concern to young people. In the education field, the strategy reflected the Education Act (1998) by focusing on the establishment of ‘school’ (student) councils and by channelling student voice through this construct with an emphasis on the development of democratic citizenship:

The education system has a special role in developing children’s sense of civic responsibility. School councils are being established to give children at post-primary level a direct involvement in the running of their schools

(*ibid.*, p. 31).

It is noteworthy that this strategy document envisaged the most significant role for students and student councils in the context of democracy and citizenship. It pointed to students having... ‘a direct involvement in the running of their schools’, in contrast to... ‘the involvement of students in the affairs of the school’ (Education Act, 1998, 27:4).

In a further response to the UNCRC (1992), a National Children’s Office within the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) was established in 2001, as was the office of the Ombudsman for Children, following the enactment of the Ombudsman for Children Act in 2002. Both developments highlight a changing position for the children’s rights discourse in Irish society.

Ten years later, in 2012, the thirty-first amendment to the Irish Constitution (1937) replaced article 42 with a more developed and elaborated text primarily focusing of the rights of children in judicial proceedings and in the care of the State. The insertion of section 4.2 into the amended article 42A (Referendum Commission, 2012), directly reflected the wording and the intention of the UNCRC (1992) particularly in the provision, by law, for the need to engage with the views of the child.

Provision shall be made by law for securing, as far as practicable, that in all proceedings referred to in subsection one of this section in respect of any child who is capable of forming his or her own views, the views of the child shall be ascertained and given due weight having regard to the age and maturity of the child.

(Referendum Commission, 2012)

While the amendment clearly establishes the rights of the child under the constitution, its provision for the voice of the child to be heard concerns children in care, adoption, guardianship, custody and access issues following judicial proceedings. The discussion and subsequent passing into law of the amendment however heightened public awareness of consultation with children in wider public discourse and particularly in the interfaces between the child and State services, including schools.

In 2012, a public consultation began that included young people on the development of a new National Children's Strategy to cover the period 2012 to 2017.

Student voice initiatives in Irish Education

A number of research and policy initiatives in the ten-year period from 2002 have engaged the voices of children and students, at different scales, and have highlighted, both from a rights-base and inclusion agenda, the value of engaging with the voices of young people as students and citizens.

A national research project: Primary Education: Ending Disadvantage (2002), focused on achieving educational equality, represents an early example of the engagement of student voice in research as 'a new mechanism to give children a voice and to place their voices alongside that of the adults in our efforts to build a coherent way of thinking about equality in children's education' (Zappone, 2002, p. 67). Using drama with fifth-class students, the study explored students' views of the causes and possible solutions to educational disadvantage. Students' feelings of being subordinated in schools and the limitation on their learning, and that of their peers due to teachers' control strategies were among the findings that emerged from the voices of the students (*ibid.*), reflecting the findings of Devine (2003a, 2004) and Lynch and Lodge (2002).

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) consulted with students on an on-going basis as an element of curriculum development and review during this period. Student consultation, in the form of focus-group interviews, was used to further develop the Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme (NCCA, 2006a), to establish a key skills framework, and flexible learning profiles for senior cycle students (NCCA, 2009b). Students had a consultative role in the development of a new syllabus for citizenship education at senior cycle,

‘Politics and Society’ (NCCA, 2009a). The major review of the junior-cycle curriculum (NCCA, 2011a) included consultation with students through Dáil na nÓg and focus group meetings in a sample of schools. The students involved made very specific points relating to curricular content, relevance, key skills and assessment (*ibid.*).

The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) advocated for a significant role for students in schools in developing their agreed code of behaviour (NEWB, 2008). A partnership approach to this process was encouraged by NEWB involving consultation with students in the development of a policy document that would directly impact on their experience in the school since ‘students are more likely to support a code of behaviour when they helped to develop it. Relationships of trust between teachers and students can grow stronger through the process’ (*ibid.*, p. 16).

The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector (Coolahan, Hussey and Kilfeather, 2012) was established by the Minister for Education and Skills to examine how the education system could provide a range of patronage models in primary schools to cater for the diverse religious and cultural needs of the population. The forum, in its deliberations, used the voices of students from both primary and post-primary schools to gather their experiences and views on religious education and on pluralism and diversity in schools. Focus group discussions, interviews and group activities were used to engage with students from a sample of schools. The students’ insightful responses included ‘A clear desire that school should be a place where all students feel included, irrespective of their beliefs’ (*ibid.*)

A variety of other related issues and initiatives have also pointed towards the re-positioning of student voice within the wider education field. A national union of secondary school students was established 2001 to represent students’ interests and support student councils. While this development received much media coverage at the time, it has failed to penetrate schools.

The National Economic and Social Partnership Agreement ‘Towards 2016’ (2006) made a single but significant reference to the student council in its focus on partnership and participation. The agreement stated that ‘the establishment and operation of democratic student councils in schools, in accordance with the Education Act 1998 and the National Children's Strategy, will be promoted’ (*ibid.*, 30.3, p. 48).

The range of engagements outlined, including national policy initiatives, task forces, forums and national agreements illustrates the growth in the inclusion of a voice for students and the realisation that while such inclusion is a right, students also have a meaningful contribution to make as key stake-holders in education. These and similar initiatives have begun a process to

embed the need, requirement and expectation that the voice of students, in these cases, a representative voice in Irish education policy, would be included and listened to in matters that affect students.

The student voice as positioned in post-primary schools

The exclusion of children from policy and decision-making at school level has been recognised throughout this period since the National Education Convention (1994). The absence of children or students from this early partnership process has been noted, as was the absence of any overarching policy for the inclusion or participation of children in decision-making. Devine, (2004) outlined the position of student voice in the context of the power and authority of schools highlighting its ‘adult-centred terms, with children confined to independent initiatives in schools rather than through any prescribed obligation to include their voice on policy decisions made (*ibid.*, p. 115). However, she also notes that though students were largely excluded, the increased involvement of parents could only be viewed as a positive development pointing towards a gradual shift in power positioning within education and schools to a situation where ‘children, as is increasingly the case with parents, are perceived along with teachers, to be partners in education with a voice to be heard and expressed’ (*ibid.*, p. 124).

Despite this, a more pessimistic and exclusionary view has also been articulated in terms of equality and the inclusion of the voices of the marginalised, including students from minority groups and those with special educational needs, as Lodge, Devine and Deegan (2004) recognised that ‘some voices came to be excluded and marginalised, while others continue to be prioritised’ (*ibid.*, p. 3). A finding that was both recognised by Shevlin and Rose (2003) and challenged through advocacy for a personalised and situated student voice (Rose and Shevlin, 2010). The silent voices of children in this context can be equated with the exclusion of these voices as:

There is no place in the current partnership model for the inclusion of groups representing the interests of minorities, including those from ethnic minority groups, those of minority beliefs, those who are differently abled, and of course children

(Lodge, Devine and Deegan, 2004, p. 4).

The student council construct as initially framed in Ireland

Arising from the Education Act (1998), the student council became the central and only construct that could provide a platform for students’ inclusion and participation in decision-making in schools and equally provide an experience of prefigurative democracy and active citizenship. The general vagueness of the Education Act in terms of prescription has been outlined. However, it

was the publication of the guidelines document for schools: *'Student Councils: A Voice for Students'*, by the Department of Education and Science (DES) in 2002 that provided some guidance on how the council should be established and developed. The title of the document, the only such guidelines to be published, directly linked the student council to student voice, and placed the concept of voice as central to the student council. The document used the terms 'involvement' and 'partnership' and made reference to 'the affairs of the school' and 'for the benefit of the school', but, reflecting the text of the Education Act (1998), at no point referred to consultation and dialogue, or any central role for students in decision-making. Nevertheless, the guidelines did extend and deepen the discourse on the role of the student council, perceiving it as representing the views of the student body to school management, promoting good communication, and supporting educational development and students' contribution to policy development (DES, 2002). An additional action, that of 'assisting', a term that is not used in earlier documents or in the Education Act, was also introduced in the guidelines document. This additional role of the council was envisaged as 'assisting with induction of new students, assisting with sporting and cultural activities, and assisting with fundraising events for charity' (*ibid.*, p. 11).

The verbs used throughout the document to describe the work of the council included: representing; promoting; supporting; contributing, and assisting. These terms outlined the limitations placed on the role of a student council as envisaged by the Department of Education and Skills, in 2002, a role that can be viewed as supportive and advisory but not as consultative or dialogic. These guidelines also reflect a reductionist view of the role and potential of the council as an instrument for student voice in a post-primary school setting. The student council as a construct, and the language used to describe its role, limited any sense of empowerment as envisaged by any general interpretation of the UNCRC that referred to 'the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child' (UNCRC, Article 12:1, 1992). Any potential for empowerment and transformation was merely envisioned as an 'involvement in the affairs of the school' (Education Act, 1998, 27:3). The potential for a transformative voice for the students had been significantly diminished by the text of the guidelines. When interrogated, these roles suggested very limited and vague involvements for students in consultation, dialogue and participation in the running of schools and in school decision-making. It is equally questionable whether the student council construct and role, as outlined in the guidelines document, was provided with space, voice, audience and a facility for response (Lundy, 2007) to allow for the development of a deep and meaningful voice for students.

While the Vocational Education (Amendment) Act, (2001) also made limited reference to a role for students in decision-making, following the publication of the guidelines document in 2002, no further written policy direction was provided to post-primary schools relating to the student

council although a support service was established which provided training and support literature for students, schools and student council liaison teachers between 2002 and 2011.

Student voice: The motivation of evaluation

It was the introduction of external evaluation and school self-evaluation during the period between 2002 and 2012 that extended the policy discourse on student voice in Ireland following the publication of the student council guidelines. The establishment of Whole-School Evaluation (WSE) in 2004 created a focus on the student council as a representative structure for students in a post-primary school as inspectors outlined their intention to interview the student council during evaluations to represent the views of students (DES, 2004). A refinement of WSE as Whole-School Evaluation: Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL) included standardised questionnaires for students and their parents as part of school inspection (DES, 2011a). This development provided a further channel for student voice in external evaluation. The questionnaires however contained closed questions and did not give the students provision for comment on issues or on their experiences in their school. Inspectors also interviewed a representative focus group of students that included members of the student council in WSE-MLL evaluation process (*ibid.*).

The combination of focus-group interviews and questionnaires visibly widened the voice of students in external evaluation. It is questionable however, whether this voice gave students the agency or power to effect changes in their experience of school. Due to the nature of these exchanges with inspectors and their context within external evaluation it could be argued that the voice of the students was largely subjugated to that of a data-source in the evaluation process. Similarly, while the WSE process provided for direct post-evaluation oral feedback and dialogue on the findings of the evaluation to the board of management, teachers, and to the principal and deputy principal, this facility for feedback was not afforded to students (DES, 2004, 2011a). The student council, through its chairperson, does receive a copy of the draft evaluation report, arguably however, all students should receive information on their input into the evaluation and on how this was acted upon by the school (Lundy, 2007). While it is open to school management to use comment from students to inform a school response to an inspection report in advance of its publication, guidance and procedures as to how comment from or feedback to students might transact in schools were not outlined or discussed in evaluation guidelines (DES, 2004, 2011a).

Engagement with inspectors arguably reinforced the visibility of the student council as a representative construct for student voice in post-primary schools during this period. The introduction of student questionnaires however, situated student voice as a data-source for

inspectors and therefore at a low level on the range of typologies of student participation in schools (Fielding, 2001b; Flutter and Rudduck, 2004; Hart, 1992). Conversely, any engagement with students as stakeholders in a school can arguably be viewed as a positive step towards the rights-based agenda as set out by the UNCRC (1992). It can also be contended however, that these initiatives do little to develop student voice from a democratic and active-citizenship perspective. In parallel to the aforementioned developments in this area in England, as discussed in Chapter Three, the motivation to use student voice in external evaluation was viewed by many in the Irish educational research community as a mechanism of control pointing towards performativity within a centralised school improvement agenda (Devine, 2003a; Lynch and Lodge, 2002).

School self-evaluation: a changing position for students?

The concept of school self-evaluation as a further evaluative instrument that emerged on to the education landscape during this period has the potential to address this silencing of student voice. The initial development of school self-evaluation began with the publication of criteria for school self-evaluation (DES, 2003). The document, *'Looking at our School'* also made reference to the student council within a very agentive subsection referring to 'involvement of students in the operation of the school' (*ibid.*, p. 40). However, the language of the descriptor, from which the school would self-evaluate, reflects the language of the Education Act (1998) and the student council guidelines (DES, 2002) by focusing the school on the evaluation of 'the extent to which the school's student council, in cooperation with management, parents and teachers, promotes the interests of the school and the involvement of students in the affairs of the school' (*ibid.*). This descriptor, as with the text of the act, reduced 'involvement' in the 'operation' of the school to one of 'promotion' of the school and involvement 'in the affairs of the school'.

School self-evaluation was also included in the education pillar of the aforementioned 'Towards 2016': the National Economic and Social Partnership agreement (2006). The agreement stated that 'the parties have agreed that each school will utilise the Department of Education and Science publication(s) "Looking at our School – an aid to self-evaluation in second level schools (2003)" to conduct a self-evaluation of school performance' (Towards 2016, 2006, 31.3, p. 126)

This agreement placed school-self evaluation on the agenda for schools and notably this was aligned with school performance although the meaning of school performance was not explained or developed. However, it could be argued that the inclusion of reference to school performance in an agreement that concerned school self-evaluation was indicative of a developing school improvement agenda already visible in external evaluations that were being established in schools at this time. The question of how student voice would be directed within these evaluation

processes was unclear.

At government policy level, reference in the programme for government presented in 2011, raised the profile of school self-evaluation. A specific reference to school performance in the context of a national literacy and numeracy initiative in 2011, also further raised the stakes for performativity as ‘a new system of self-evaluation will be introduced, requiring all schools to evaluate their performance year by year and publish information across a wide range of criteria’ (DES, 2011c). This strategy, while making no direct reference to student voice, uses the language pointing to schools reporting on school performance, in this case on improvements in students’ literacy and numeracy on a regular basis.

It was the publication of school self-evaluation guidelines (Inspectorate, 2012a) however, that significantly advanced the student voice agenda in both primary and post-primary schools. The term student voice was particularly mentioned in the document in the context of a role for students in the process viewed as ‘the inclusion of the voice of students and parents in school self-evaluation processes’ (*ibid.*, p. 9). Significantly, however, these guidelines located student voice for the first time in the context of classroom practice where it was placed as an evaluation criterion for teachers underscoring the pedagogical importance of engagement and consultation. Teachers were encouraged to evaluate student voice in their classrooms based on descriptors reflecting these dual elements:

Students’ contributions and questions are encouraged and welcomed in the classroom

Due account is taken of students’ views and opinions in accordance with their age and maturity

(*ibid.*, p. 42).

The guidelines do not make any reference to a role for the student council in school self-evaluation but focus on a wider concept of student voice as ‘eliciting the views of students’ (*ibid.*, p. 50). It is clear that these references to student voice viewed it as largely instrumental in the context of low-level participation in the provision of data. The guidelines fail to develop any sense of deep dialogic consultation with students or the methods to structure these engagements though they do make reference to the use of questionnaires, interviews and reflections. Nevertheless, an emphasis is placed on accountability reflected in the requirement on schools to produce a school self-evaluation report and a school improvement plan (Inspectorate, 2012a).

School self-evaluation, as introduced in 2012 represents the most significant and visible advance for the voice of students in pedagogy and in consultation in school decision-making in Ireland to date. Encouraging ‘students’ contributions and questions’ and ‘students’ views and opinions’

within an official educational policy document is a significant advance from ‘involvement of students in the affairs of the school’ (Education Act, 1998, 27:3).

Despite this, two significant risks emerge from these developments. In moving away from the student council as a representative student voice, arguably, an instrumentalist voice is being encouraged and directed primarily towards the gathering data to inform and measure school performance and school improvement. Consequently, there is a risk that the opportunity to develop and embed deep student voice, as meaningful consultation, co-construction and the creation of dialogic, person-centred democratic and inclusive schools, will be diminished or even lost. Equally, the growing association between student voice, school improvement and performance, through various forms of evaluation, and reference to reporting on these initiatives, suggests some parallels with the aforementioned experiences in England relating to performativity and accountability.

In 2012, student voice seemed to be moving past the audition to finally finding a part in the drama of voices in Irish schools. The development of this role could however become potentially silenced if viewed as an instrument of evaluation by education authorities, and therefore could lose any interactive potential for change at school and classrooms level based on trust, relationships and learning. The opportunity to advance student voice as a human dialogic interaction within an inclusive classroom and school culture could be intercepted by a drive towards measurable improvements in standards. The growing emphasis in England by the Office of Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (OFSTED) on measuring standards and school improvement (OFSTED, 1992, 2004, 2006a, 2010), arguably subverted the pedagogical and the wider rights-based and democratic-citizenship motivations and potential for student voice (Arnot and Reay, 2007; Bragg, 2007b, 2007c; Fielding, 1997, 2004b, 2011; Gunter and Thomson, 2006, 2007). Similar developments could potentially be foreseen in Irish education.

The student council as a student voice construct

The aforementioned Department of Education and Science guidelines document ‘Student Councils: a voice for students’ (2002) is the only policy document to provide a definition of the structure and role of a council in an Irish post-primary school setting. A student council was set out as ‘a representative structure through which students in a post-primary school can become involved in the affairs of the school, working in partnership with the school management and staff and parents for the benefit of the school and its students’ (DES, 2002, p. 8).

This definition utilised the wording of the Education Act (1998), focusing on ‘involvement in the affairs of the school’, but introduced the idea of a partnership and the representative nature of the council. The inclusion of these terms pointed towards an agenda of participative democracy and active citizenship ‘for the benefit’ of all stakeholders.

This envisioning of the role of the council can be viewed in particular contrast to that of the Education Act, UK (2002) that outlined the requirement for English schools to consult students about decisions that affect them. The Education and Skills Act, UK, (2008) further extended student voice, as the governing body of a school was required to appropriately consider the views of students when making decisions. However, student councils have been a feature of schools across the UK for many years. An early description of a student council from an English perspective focuses on nominated or elected students providing advice or making decisions. As early as 1970, the school council was identified as ‘a body, in part nominated or elected by pupils which meets from time to time from weekly to annually and whose chief function is to advise the school authorities or to take decisions which they may or may not implement’ (Chapman, 1970a, p. 268). A later description of student councils by the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) reflected a greater emphasis on representative democracy, but with a particular reference to partnership with students in their education. Student councils in this definition were ‘democratically elected groups of students who represent their peers and enable students to become partners in their own education, making a positive contribution to the school environment and ethos’ (School Councils UK, cited by Whitty and Wisby, 2007, p. 30).

A more simplified description of the construct focused on the representative nature of a council as a means of presenting students’ views was outlined in research carried out in advance of promoting the establishment of student councils in Northern Ireland viewing a school council as ‘a group of pupils within a school, elected by their peers to represent them and their views’ (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2011, p. 4).

Based on the experience of the growth and development of student councils in Scottish schools over time ‘the dominant model of a pupil council in Scotland today is one in which a reasonably representative group of students are elected as pupil councillors and perform a consultative and collaborative influencing role within their schools, particularly around school life issues of direct and immediate importance to students themselves’ (Children in Scotland, 2010, p. 8). Scottish councils emphasise a deeper role of influence for the student council through reference to consultation and collaboration with a focus on issues that impact directly on students.

Wales is the only jurisdiction in the UK that requires schools to establish a student council (Welsh

Assembly Government, 2005). The Welsh Assembly Government provides a detailed outline of a council that includes direction on roles and involvements in planning, governance and recruitment of staff. In the Welsh context a school council is seen as:

A group of pupils elected by their fellow pupils to represent their opinions and raise issues with the headteacher and governors in the school. The school council can also take forward projects on behalf of the pupils, and be involved in planning and things like the School Development Plan, governing body meetings and interviewing staff

(*ibid.*).

These definitions from policy makers in five jurisdictions on the islands of Ireland and Britain emphasise a representative democratic and participative role for student councils. They focus particularly on the elected, representative nature of the council that has a varying and sometimes unspecified role in school activities and decision-making. The range of emphases however, extends from students' involvement and partnership, to advice, consultation and collaboration, and to deeper involvements in school decision-making.

The extent to which student councils had been established in schools equally varied across the jurisdictions cited. A total of 68% of Irish post-primary schools were found to have a functioning student council in operation in a survey completed by the Democracy Commission (2005). In Scotland, 90% of schools had 'whole school' pupil councils (Children in Scotland, 2010), while 95% of schools in England were found to have functioning school councils (Whitty and Wisby, 2007). Since 2005, all publicly funded schools in Wales were required to have a student council (Welsh Assembly Government, 2005, 2009) while the Department of Education in Northern Ireland was actively supporting the establishment of student councils in 2011 (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2011).

Responses to questionnaires provided to students in schools by inspectors during whole-school evaluations in Ireland from 2010 provide an indication of the penetration and visibility of the student council in these schools. The responses to one particular question pointed toward a limited visibility for the student council as a representative and participatory construct. From over 9,000 responses to student questionnaires used in WSE-MLL in seventy post-primary schools, just 41% of students responded that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I have a say in how to make my school a better place', a further 36% either disagreed or strongly disagreed while the remaining 23% of students stated that they 'didn't know' (Inspectorate, 2012b). While not analysed by school type or by age of student, a slight gender imbalance was revealed in that of the group who agreed or strongly agreed, 45% were female while 37% were male. These figures for Irish post-primary schools, within this one-year timeframe, indicate low levels of participation and engagement by students in any prefigurative democratic structures.

A critique of the student council construct in Irish education

The growth in student councils in Irish post-primary schools was initially viewed in the context of enabling participation, responsibility and accountability on the part of students and thereby providing an important exercise in democracy (O’Gorman, 1998). The limited but more recent research on student councils in Ireland however reveals a different perspective.

An experimental student council in an Irish primary school identified a subordinated role for students (McLoughlin, 2004). Frustration was evident on the part of students due to the slow pace of change, poor communication with the student body and the student’s perception of adult control in reference to teachers’ veto on discussion and decisions, and their imposition of sanctions (*ibid.*). While student voice is presented through the student council construct as a rights-based and citizenship project, the spectre of tokenism emerges:

The reality of children’s present subordinate and ‘incomplete’ citizenship presents Irish educators with an immediate challenge. Token student councils should not be tolerated whereby they perpetuate this subordination

(*ibid.*, p. 141).

Research involving fourteen student councils in post-primary schools in Ireland found differing perceptions of the council by school management and students (Keogh and Whyte, 2005). Boards of management viewed the council as a consultative group, as a provider of information, as a communication channel and as a resource. Teachers in the same study, perceived the student council as a forum for students’ concerns, peer support particularly in the area of social isolation and potential bullying, and as having a role in improving the school atmosphere. All the adults in the study identified the educational opportunity provided by the council to facilitate students to learn about teamwork, democratic processes, negotiation skills, and to identify issues and strategies for sustainable change in the school (*ibid.*).

Students’ views, in contrast, saw the expected role and purpose of the council as one of action: listening to students; representing students’ views; contributing to policy; providing feedback to the student body, and changing things like ‘school uniform, changing food in the canteen, fixing things, dealing with issues, solving problems, helping students and organising events’ (*ibid.*, p. 55). However students’ views on the effectiveness of the council were largely negative, citing apathy among the student cohort relating to difficulties in communication, representation and feedback. Elitism were also identified as, citing one student, ‘only people who stand out and who work would get a position on the student council...people seen as messers wouldn’t have a chance’ (*ibid.*, p. 83). Its reflection of prefigurative democracy is also questioned as, in the view of another student

‘the student council is all for show, so that they can say it’s like a democracy, but it’s not...because at the end of the day, only the staff have a say’ (*ibid.*, p. 83), a finding that echoes those of (Arnot, McIntyre, Pedder and Reay, 2004; Fielding, 2001a).

Responses to a national audit of student councils conducted by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA) in 2011 indicated quite negative views from students. Just 208 councils from a total of over 720 post-primary schools responded. The 29% response rate, in itself, was indicative of a weak visibility for student councils in Irish post-primary schools. Of those that did respond to the audit, the majority of responses pointed towards tokenistic and very limited involvements for the student council in decision-making with just 50% of councils feeling that their views were taken seriously by school management (OMCYA, 2011). While the majority of councils felt that they were consulted on issues relating to school rules and policy formation, a majority of council members also identified their limited impact on decisions making.

Thus, though the rhetoric of the role for the council in a school points towards visibility and potential for engagement and participation in democratic practice, the lived experience appears to be largely negative. A statement by the Democracy Commission (2005), [whose attention was focused on the capacity for democracy across the island of Ireland ‘to be inclusive, participatory and egalitarian’ (*ibid.*, p. xi) in the context of the Good Friday Peace Agreement between the parties in Northern Ireland] seems prescient as it concluded that ‘student councils give students a voice but not a say’ (Democracy Commission, 2005, p. 33).

The student council experience in the UK

Research and experiences of the student council outside of Ireland are equally informed by the rhetoric of policy aspiration that contrasts with the students’ lived experiences. A body of research has pointed to a policy motivation primarily reflecting the rights-based agenda of the UNCRC (1992) and a curricular motivation towards education for citizenship and the development of democratic participation and active citizenship in schools (Alderson, 2000; Cox and Robinson-Pant, 2006; Fielding, 1973; Johnson, 2004; Kerr and Cleaver, 2004; Kerr, McCarthy and Smith 2002; Klein, 2003; Mannion, 2007; Taylor, 2002).

Despite the policy discourse in Scotland which sees the student council at the centre of its curriculum for citizenship (Children in Scotland, 2010), it was found that students in Scottish schools, through their councils, discussed and addressed issues of concern in their daily interactions relating to food, toilets and break-times but were not specifically involved ‘in

academic/educational matters (e.g. appointment of teachers or content of the curriculum' (*ibid.*, p. 2).

Similarly in the UK, a survey of 250 schools (Alderson, 2000) found that policy expectation and experience were not aligned, as the students' responses indicated negative and often tokenistic engagement by students in the school council. The study raised the challenge of lived democratic practices in schools in contrast to taught citizenship programmes and concluded that 'it is illogical to expect students to understand lessons about rights and democracy and at the same time not to realise when their rights are disrespected at school, or not to be sceptical about discrepancies between what teachers practice and preach' (*ibid.*, p. 133)

The issue therefore of the student council as representing prefigurative democracy and action towards change in schools becomes a significant question which focuses on student councils as a construct to achieve both aims. Prefigurative democratisation requires that councils as:

Representative bodies for pupils are embedded in a deeper democratisation, involving fundamental aspects of teacher-student relations and decision-making over teaching and learning...this is important in order to avoid fragmented instances of pupil participation leading to trivialisation and tokenism

(McCowan, 2010, p. 22)

It is argued that the limited nature of council activities is more representative of taught citizenship and democracy rather than a lived and experienced democratic practice resulting in action (Cox and Robinson-Pant, 2006). Gaining voice through the council is potential preparation for active citizenship in the future (Klein, 2003; Rudduck, 2003), but too much adult direction of the work of councils limits their potential as lived democratic experiences.

Hence action and the agency to act are central to the effectiveness of a council since 'without the power to act on the decisions that they make, children's participation can be tokenistic and remains on the level of role-play—arguably an effective way of acquiring concepts and skills but, in itself leaving the institutional power structures unchallenged' (Cox and Robinson-Pant, 2006, p. 528).

Fielding, writing as early as 1973, highlighted the need for participation in engaging with democratic practice in schools 'democracy has to do with participation, that is to say active involvement and its attendant responsibilities' (Fielding, 1973, p. 222). Student councils, as an instrument of student voice, therefore came to represent a tension between preparing students for citizenship through the curriculum, and participation in citizenship activities (Mannion, 2007). One element of this tension identified the need to teach young students about the rights and responsibilities of citizenship while another viewed the council as an emancipatory construct to

allow student voice to be included and heard (*ibid.*). Similarly, Fielding writing nearly thirty years later in 2001, identifies the need to focus on the value of the skills that are developed through the experience of student voice as participative and active democracy:

Unless teachers and students see the skills and capacities associated with the growth of student voice as integrally connected with the practical realities of democracy and democratic citizenship in the lived, day-to-day context of real schools as they exist now, then those skills will turn out to be virtually worthless

(Fielding, 2001a, p.104).

The expression of a role for a student council within a school climate that is dominated by regulation and control is a further identified tension in research (Wyness, 2005). Wyness argued that while students are viewed as key stakeholders in a school they had almost no say in how their school was structured or how it operated. Student councils were subject to control that ran counter to the idea of student voice as fundamental to citizenship and democracy stating that ‘within the schools...there was a strong imperative to regulate school councils in terms of space, timing and content’ (*ibid.*, p. 11).

Wyness viewed the council as a device that straddled the divide between the traditional spaces, identities and roles occupied by students and teachers where it sits ‘uneasily between a political space that reflects students’ interests and the regulatory imperatives of a late modern educational agenda’ (*ibid.*, p.11). In a similar vein, Wyse (2001) argued that the dominant and controlling impact of the curriculum limits the freedom of council activities to enhance students’ rights.

Given these contestations relating to preparatory or prefigurative democratic practice, the freedom or regulation of the council, and the tension between the curricular demands for taught citizenship programmes and the rights-based motivations for a student council construct, apathy toward the council, difficulties in engaging students and the accusation of being simply a ‘talking shop’ (McGrath, 1971, p. 317) have been levelled at the student council construct.

While issues of tokenism, representation, elitism, apathy and communication emerge from the body of research on student councils, the most significant question relating to the construct remains one of motivation as identified in Chapter Two in the broader context of student voice in schools. Current research indicates both a rights-based and democratic citizenship motivation for the council construct based on an elected parliamentary model to represent the voices of students through their ‘involvement of students in the affairs of the school’ (Education Act, 1998, 27:3) in Ireland. Across the jurisdictions of the UK, a similar policy agenda is visible but with a significant link to the taught citizenship programmes (Crick, 1998). It is argued however, that unlike the UK, the link between the taught curricular dimension of citizenship education and the student council construct

in Ireland is weak and provides very limited connection for students to what should be prefigurative democratic experiences through engagement with the student council.

The motivation in establishing student councils in Irish post-primary schools therefore was arguably one of compliance with the UNCRC (1992). This became transposed through the Education Act (1998) and the National Children's Strategy (2000) to provide a representative democratic construct in schools. The limitations of the construct as set out in the policy discourse have further emerged from research and cast serious doubt on whether a council in the Irish post-primary school context can give students 'a direct involvement in the running of their schools' (National Children's Strategy, 2000) or afford them a voice to facilitate their 'right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them' (UNCRC, 1989).

Conclusion

This analysis of the student council within the emerging broad policy and practice context of student voice, particularly in the Irish education, viewed the evolving position and role of the council as education for citizenship and democracy, as reflecting a prefigurative experience and as reflecting the lived experience of students. However, external evaluation and school self-evaluation now also occupy the stage. Questions of the perception and expression of role and the need for meaningful representative and participative structures in contrast to tokenistic experiences continue to emerge as sub plots throughout the discussion of the student council in the context of student voice. In the Irish post-primary school context, it is difficult to see a meaningful, emancipatory and transformative student voice emerging from the current student council construct. This is a key focus of the engagement with the student councils in the three case-study schools in this research.

Arising from the research on student councils reviewed above, the tension between policy discourse, aspirations towards participative democracy in schools, and power and authority of schools run by adults is the fundamental dilemma for the student council as a construct for student voice. This situation arises arguably from the lack of clarity regarding the role of the council, its motivation and justification from a rights-based and policy perspective, and the afore-mentioned tension between active and taught citizenship. The positioning of student voice and the student council within an externally motivated school evaluation framework further adds to the tension and contestation on this stage. Regulation of the council, it is argued, also reflects a discourse of power in schools based on the Foucauldian instruments of discontinuity, dividing practices and surveillance. This positions the student council as an instrument for the management and control of students (Arnot and Reay, 2007; Fielding 2007, 2011) that notionally provides them with a

voice as required by right and by policy but limits that voice and the potential of the student council as a construct for that voice.

Part II

The Production: Building the Set



Chapter 5 – Research Design

Chapter 5 – Research Design

Introduction and rationale

THE RESEARCH DESIGN arises from the key research questions as outlined in Chapter One, and from the theoretical and conceptual frameworks as presented. The complexity of the concept relating to relationship, participation, children's rights, democracy, citizenship, power and motivation have been presented and critiqued through the lenses of student voice research literature and educational policy, particularly on the Irish educational stage. The primary aim of this study was to explore student voice as a drama played out in classrooms, where no policy provision, motivation or experience of student voice exists, and at the student council that is loosely bounded by policy.

The research poses a key question: how is student voice currently manifest in the students' experience of Irish post-primary schools? Deeper exploration of this question brought the following into sharp focus:

- How are the voices of students heard in the current pedagogical experience of students in their daily classroom interaction with their teachers?
- What is the students' experience of student voice when afforded in the classroom?
- Does the student council construct reflect an expression of prefigurative democracy that facilitates students to have a voice and a say in decision making at whole-school level?
- If afforded by right as meaningful and democratic participation, engagement and consultation in the context of school and classroom experiences, how would student voice find expression and how would it impact on students' and teachers' experiences in these classrooms and in the whole school?

This research explored these questions through engaging with the voices of students in nine classrooms and with nine teachers in three Irish post-primary case-study schools. The participant teachers engaged with the voices of their students through dialogic consultation on their learning and on their experiences in the classroom in two phases during one school year. These teachers were interviewed at the initial stages of the research period and on completion of the two phases of the student voice project. Initially, the teachers engaged students in a discussion on their classroom practices and the students' experience in their classroom. Teachers then reflected on their classroom practice based on the views of the students as expressed through the discussion and in their written responses to a questionnaire. They then taught units of work from their planned programmes taking account of the students' commentary. Following this series of lessons the

students completed a further questionnaire and a written reflection. A focus group of students from each classroom was also interviewed on completion of each phase of the study period. Written reflective diaries were completed by each participating teacher on their experience of pedagogy based on student voice.

In the same study period, student voice as expressed through the student council in these three post-primary schools was explored. As the council developed its programme of work for the school year, the role, structure and positioning of the council as a representative voice for students within decision-making processes in the school was explored throughout the full academic year. In each school, meetings of the council were observed and a focus group of student council members completed reflective sheets and was interviewed at the beginning and towards the end of the school year. The voices of the student council liaison teacher and the school principal were also heard through interview.

Student voice, beyond the student council construct, does not have visibility in the educational script that informs school and classroom practice in Irish post-primary schools though the term and concept has begun to find its position on the stage through external evaluation and more particularly from its inclusion in school self-evaluation guidelines published by the Inspectorate (Inspectorate, 2012a). Research literature, particularly from England, outlines both the complexity and initial challenge to schools and classrooms relating to student voice initiatives. These challenges emerge particularly through the perceived external imposition of student voice as an instrument of school improvement, accountability and control. Such concerns could come to the fore in Ireland following the embedding of school self-evaluation. In this context, a research design that explored the concept of student voice in Irish post-primary schools focusing on the classroom context and on the pedagogical relationship between student and teacher in tandem with a focus on the particular experiences of students in the student council was chosen. A qualitative research design centred on case-study research with a number of data sources was therefore chosen to explore the drama of student voice in post-primary schools.

Grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was used as the framework for data analysis to explore this concept in schools. Grounded theory reflects the constructivist framing of this research in that theory was not deductively tested in schools but emerged inductively from interactions with the participants (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007), from the rich data sources that were engaged, and from their close analysis and interrogation (Charmaz, 2006).

Constructivist grounded theory emphasises the situated relationships, interactions and experiences of the participants and the alertness of the researcher to contextual patterns, temporal changes, the complexity of

positions and the emergence of difference in behaviour, action and consequence

(Richards and Morse, 2007).

The close and reflexive relationship with the participants is emphasised in a grounded theory research framing. Equally, the significance of the situated nature of that research, and the action and interaction in engagement with or in response to a particular process or phenomenon, in this case student voice, is an on going focus (Creswell, 1998).

Students' voices were therefore listened to in the context of dialogic consultation with their teachers and through their engagement with the student council. The voices of the teacher, that of the school principal and the student council liaison teacher were also engaged within the context of the overall engagement with, and experience of, student voice in each school. To achieve depth, meaning and understanding, qualitative research combining a number of data sources was used within a case-study research design. Three case-study school settings were identified.

This research design represents an initial step towards engaging with student voice in Irish post-primary classrooms and is, as such, cautious in its initiation of this contested and sometimes challenging process for teachers particularly in the absence of any policy or practice motivation.

Qualitative research

This research is qualitative and is grounded in understanding human actions, activities and behaviours. Qualitative research allows for engagement, and in this research, through a socio-cultural theoretical lens, allows the researcher to gain an insight into the complexity and dynamics of student voice. This research explores the multiple social realities or constructions that emerge through the engagement of student voice in these schools and classrooms. Reality for these students and their teachers is not definable in advance but emerges as socially constructed in the study context. Qualitative research methods were chosen therefore to allow for the understanding of these constructions within the culture or context of each particular school and classroom.

Qualitative research concerns the study of empirical realities in terms of case studies, real life experiences, behaviours and texts, to understand both their complexities and meanings. Definitions of qualitative research focus on the gathering of non-numeric data to understand and analyse behaviour in natural human or social settings. Definitions reference complexity, exploration, discovery and induction (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Mertens, 2005) as qualitative research attempts to understand a pattern, situation or behaviour in its totality. Patterns are observed and from their analysis a study of the situation or the behaviour emerges (Mertens, 2005).

The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting
(Creswell, 1998, p. 15).

The central ontological assumption of qualitative research is that reality, knowledge and meaning are constructed by individuals interacting in their own social contexts. Qualitative research therefore attempts to understand the experiences, feelings, realities and reactions of the participants in these cultural contexts. Unlike quantitative research methods, it seeks to research and understand the totality and complexity of this world without its deconstruction, or without statistically abstracting its variables to test their significance.

Epistemologically, qualitative research looks at the world from the lived experience of the participant rather than objectively from the researcher standpoint. The researcher is the main instrument of the research (Bryman, 2008; Merriam, 1998). This lived experience is mediated through the eyes and ears of the researcher with a keen and careful eye on the risk of bias. Qualitative research also engages the researcher in fieldwork which involves working with the participants in their own setting, to observe how they behave in that context. This type of research therefore involves an inductive rather than a deductive research strategy. Concepts, abstractions, generalisations and theories build from the ground up (Merriam, 1998). They build toward theory or generalisation that may emerge from the findings in the field.

Validity in qualitative research is addressed through the use of a wide range of sources and through engagement with these sources over a prolonged period. Validity and authenticity is also addressed through the ongoing review and analysis of findings and by triangulation (Mertens, 2005). While validity, authenticity, trustworthiness or relevance (Bryman, 2008) are a concern for qualitative researchers and a challenge or criticism from the quantitative research community, the search for consistency between sites or cases does exclude the existence of multiple realities (Mertens, 2005). Qualitative research allows for the understanding of these realities, as they exist in particular sites and situations. Triangulation of sources provides internal validity and the use of multiple methods on multiple groups over a prolonged period of time ensures the validity of the research in that setting.

External reliability represents the extent to which research findings will be replicated in other settings. The primary source for reliability is the use of multiple settings or cases researched using standardised methods of data gathering. Rich and detailed descriptions of reality, research of several settings, and triangulation relating to the multiple methods of data collection combine to enhance transferability (Merriam, 1998).

Underpinning qualitative research design, data collection methods and subsequent data analysis is the positioning and identity of the researcher. Reflexivity refers to the effect of the researcher's background, identity and position on the research design and interpretation of findings (Malterud, 2001). It concerns the effect of the researcher on the research and focuses on the awareness of different approaches and positions taken by researchers and an on-going discussion as to whether these approaches signify bias or, once stated and positioned, add to the wholeness and richness of the qualitative research. A reflexive approach accepts and acknowledges the positioning and influence of the researcher on the research design and data gathering processes. It also refers to an awareness and acknowledgement of the potential for bias and the willingness to forefront and to address these issues in both the gathering and analysis of the data. Thus, reflexivity within qualitative research reflects openness and an acceptance of the values that the researcher brings to the process (Creswell, 2003).

Throughout the research design, data gathering and analysis of data, the positioning of this researcher was appropriately identified and recognised by participants. The analysis of questionnaires and the interpretation of interview transcripts required an awareness of that positioning and reflection on its potential impact on the emerging research findings. Reflexivity in this context requires an awareness of the standpoint of the researcher and willingness to:

Seek to show a sensitivity to a range of interpretations and voices in your data, and a willingness to critique and question your own as well as those of others...including understanding the shaping role of our own gaze

(Mason, 2002, p. 177).

Qualitative research provides a full and detailed description of the topic, issue or situation. Research questions are broad and wide reaching and, as knowledge and meaning emerge, these questions, the direction of the study and the design of the research can be refocused. The researcher is centrally engaged in the gathering. Observation, interview or primary documentary sources are key among the data sources. The researcher is connected to the research as a participant, an observer, or both, but is reflexive in the context of that positioning. What emerges is a narrative based on the reality of one or a number of cases from which conclusions are drawn based on the specific contexts. The data is detailed, complex, and is nuanced by the context from which the generalisations emerge.

The case study

At the centre of this qualitative research study are three case studies. A case study refers to the study of a specific issue, pattern or behaviour in a specific setting.

A case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon or social unit

(Merriam, 1998, p. 34).

A case study method is best applied when research addresses descriptive or explanatory questions and aims to produce a first-hand understanding of people and events (Yin, 2006). The case in this research is the school, specific class groups within that school and the student council. The study does not venture outside of the boundaries that the case-study schools provide. The subjects of the case are the students, teachers and the school principal identified as a limited and identifiable groups of participants.

In this research, three cases were used to provide a comparative analysis of different school cultures, which allowed the study to benefit from evidence from a number of cases, and further allowed for comparison or contrasts, and identification of particular themes and variables across the cases. Multiple case studies, in this situation, three schools, created more robust research. Following the gathering phase, the data was related and compared, emergent themes were identified and these were referenced against the key research questions, student voice research and policy literature, and then triangulated and validated across the range of sources and gathering methods. This form of triangulation allowed for a comparison with existing knowledge towards a deeper understanding and the identification of patterns within the cases (Yin, 2006).

Case-study research focuses on particularisation. It references particular details of individual experiences from which generalisations can then be drawn (Merriam, 1998). Cases are therefore studied in great depth:

The general lies in the particular; that is what we learn in a particular situation we can transfer or generalise to similar situations subsequently encountered

(*ibid.*, p. 210).

As with qualitative research methods in general, case studies can also be challenged in the context of validity and reliability since understanding a concept, behaviour or pattern in context is the primary purpose of case-study research. Careful conceptualisation and ethical practice are required to address issues of validity. However, the proximity of the researcher to reality in the context of case-study research, and an acceptance that reality, meaning and understanding as ever changing, are central to ensuring validity in qualitative research (*ibid.*). It is the presence of the researcher, within or in close proximity to the case, that can ensure validity. Internal validity within the case can be achieved through the close engagement and participation of the researcher, an extended research period, continual self-reflection, questioning of the data, and re-evaluation of the fieldwork processes (LeCompte, Preissle and Tesch, 1993). Equally, reliability is secured through

consistent data gathering in a number of settings. This, combined with detailed analysis based on triangulation arising from data gathered using a range of methods, will assure the reliability of the findings from case-study research.

The complexity of student voice and its relative absence in Irish schools facilitates a case study that allows for a holistic and deep examination of the concept in the classroom and the school. To this end, the case study was 'particular, descriptive and heuristic' (Merriam, 1998, p. 29). It focused on a particular setting yet is descriptive in that it provides a detailed and deep description of the action, interaction and process as it operates in the particular setting. It is heuristic in that it explains and contains the range of actions, interactions and reactions to student voice in those settings. New knowledge and understanding can therefore emerge from these actions as described in that particular setting that 'can bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the readers' experience, or confirm what is known' (Merriam, 1998, p. 30).

A case study in the context of this research is therefore robust in that meanings that emerge are based on the reality of the setting. Meanings are set in context and are mediated through the experience of the researcher either as participant or as external observer (Merriam, 1998). This referencing of the findings contributes to generalisation, validity and reliable application to other settings.

Data collection methods

A range of data collection methods based on case-study schools was used in this research. These included questionnaires, interviews and reflections. Questionnaires containing open-ended questions were administered to students in each participating classroom. Students from each class group were then interviewed as a focus group. Participating teachers were interviewed on two occasions. At whole-school level, the members of the student council were interviewed at the outset and on completion of the research period. The principal and the student council liaison teacher were also interviewed in relation to the working and role of the student council in each case-study school.

Students were also asked to complete a reflection sheet to elicit their responses to their experiences of student voice while their teachers completed a reflective diary that traced their engagement with the student voice process through phase one and two of the research.

The questionnaire

The questionnaire gave all of the students in each of the case-study classrooms a voice through their written responses to prompt questions. The questionnaires were designed with the specific purpose of consulting with students to elicit their responses and reactions to their experience of pedagogy in the context of a specific class group, teacher and subject. Data from these questionnaires was not quantified but used as written narrative by both the teacher and this researcher to elicit the voices of these students.

Students were asked to respond to their pre-existing experiences in the school and classroom through an initial student questionnaire. They then addressed similar questions at the end of the research phase to capture their experiences of student voice in the classroom as their teachers responded in their pedagogical practices to the views expressed by the students (**see Appendix 1**).

The students were asked to respond in writing relating to their experience of pedagogy and to their experiences following the dialogic consultation. The questions also sought to explore the affective domain relating to students' reaction to their classroom experience and also, to identify recognition of resultant actions or changes in the classroom following the consultation. No sampling was required as all the students in the lessons were asked to respond to the questionnaire by their teachers in the context of their classroom.

The interview

Interviews engaged with the voice of the individual and were therefore central to the research and understanding of student voice in the classroom and within the student council. Interviews allowed for direct engagement with the key participants in this research: the students, their teachers, the student council liaison teachers, and the school principals. Interviews facilitated these voices to be heard and were central to understanding the insights and the reactions to the engagement of student voice in the daily interactions of the classroom and the whole-school engagement with the student council. As an oral exercise, these voices were heard and were then both complemented and triangulated with the inner voices of the teachers and students as represented through their reflections.

Interviewing is viewed as an effective research methodology in that it allows the researcher to probe meanings, issues and understandings at a face-to-face level (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). The interview allows the subject to check the meaning of a question and reword or rephrase their answer if necessary. It allows for long and detailed answers and yet is flexible in allowing the

interviewer to record or restructure the questions depending on the response. The interview allows for rechecking, re-probing and summing up in the context of deep inquiry.

While questionnaires and reflection rely on the honesty and integrity of the participant, the nuances of the face-to-face interaction with the researcher in person creates a further dynamic but equally a very rich source of data for the research. These nuances include the perceived power differential between the interviewer and participant, and also language, question type and question format. Other issues in research interviews include the interviewee's prior experiences and their opinions, values, feelings and knowledge, in this case, of student voice. Equally, the setting requires careful consideration in both the planning and completion of the interviews. The research interview is not a conversation between equals as the researcher defines and controls the event. Interviews engage in critical dialogue and questioning to explore issues (*ibid.*).

Semi-structured interviews were used with the participants in this research that followed a prepared agenda of questions but with a flexibility to allow the participants to develop their answers and to take their response in new directions (see **Appendix 2**). Interviews were undertaken with the school principal, the participating teachers, a focus group of students from each participating class group, the members of the student council and the student council liaison teacher. The recordings of these interviews represented the actual voices of the participants in each case-study school. These interviews, as a key element of this case-study based qualitative research, provided a direct insight into the culture and context of each classroom and student council in each case. They provided depth to the analysis as these represented the actual spoken voices of the participants. What was said was then triangulated with the questionnaire responses and with those provided through reflection to achieve internal validation and external reliability across the cases.

The reflection

Reflection as a process allows the subject to examine their personal reactions to a situation, their decision-making, their behaviour and their resulting actions. Reflection within teachers' practice is viewed as moving away from behavioural approaches in the classroom towards practice informed by context, culture and action (Valli, 1992). In this way, reflection as a research method mirrors both a constructivist and emancipatory theorisation of student voice as both students and teachers are facilitated to express their voices in the context of dialogue and consultation towards co-construction. Reflection therefore, representing the inner unspoken voice, provides deeper insights into situated responses to classroom and student council experiences.

Reflection can operate at a number of levels including a focus on the practical issues in teaching, classroom management and procedures. Reflection can also focus on academic issues relating to curriculum, planning, teaching and learning, and assessment (*ibid.*). However, of particular focus in this research, is personal reflection involving the positioning of the self as teacher or student, reflecting on relationships, on experiences within the context of a school and classroom from the perspective of routines, established practices and hierarchies.

Reflection can be viewed as personalising and deepening learning (Moon, 2003). It facilitates students to engage in higher-order thinking skills by engaging them in evaluation and assessment of their learning. Teachers and students can use reflective practice to learn from situations and to generate new understandings of actions or issues. A number of levels of reflection in the context of student or teacher learning are identified, including descriptive writing at the most basic level followed by dialogic reflection pointing towards a deeper engagement and discourse. Critical reflection extends this process to the level where actions and reactions can be viewed in the context of culture extending from the self to the social and cultural context of the interactions or activities (*ibid.*).

In the context of this research, students were asked to reflect on their experience of student voice as a dialogic consultation, on their resulting pedagogical experiences, and on their experience of the student council. These reflections were facilitated through the completion of a reflection sheet (see **Appendix 4**). Teachers were also asked to use a reflective diary over the research period in an attempt to capture their reflective voice on their experiences of dialogic consultation and of student voice in their classrooms.

Written reflections were viewed as further voice for students and teachers in the context of this research. The students' written reflections provided personal responses to the student council and to the changes they experienced in their classroom. The personal journal responses of the teachers were viewed as a critical dialogic reflection involving deep analysis of activities and of the teacher's role within these interactions. A reflective diary provided a personalised view of the teacher and allowed for the tracing of their reaction to student voice in the classroom and at whole-school level throughout the research period. These diaries provided reflections based on the teachers' perspective of their own responses to the dialogic process, to the changes, both pedagogical and relational, that they experienced throughout engagement with the voices of the students, and also through their personal reactions to the process. The teachers' reflective diaries provided a temporal perspective across the study period and both complemented and triangulated data gathered through interview and questionnaire in tracing the process and impact of student voice.

Data gathering in the field

The identification of case-study schools and teachers

Three parameters circumscribed the identification of case-study schools and teachers to engage in this research. Primarily, permission from the board of management and the principal for the school community to become involved, secondly the willingness of teachers to voluntarily engage with the research, and finally the identification of a range of schools in relation to the different sectors; voluntary secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive or private fee paying, and the gender of the student cohort.

Identification of schools involved some aspects of convenience as the sample was confined to schools within a forty-mile radius of the university. This area contains approximately eighty post-primary schools. Of these, forty-four are voluntary secondary schools, twenty-four are vocational or community colleges while the remaining twelve are community or comprehensive schools. In the period in advance of the fieldwork, the possibility of engaging in this research was suggested informally to the school principals in a large number of these schools. Though significant resistance to engagement was experienced, six post-primary schools expressed some interest in participation. These schools, representing the voluntary secondary, vocational and community and comprehensive sectors were then approached by phone call, followed by a letter to the principal. In advance of outline permission, a meeting was sought with each principal. The extent of the potential involvement of the students and teachers was discussed, as was the role of the researcher and level of intrusion in the school. Of the six schools approached, just two readily agreed and, in the case of a third school, only the agreement of the student council liaison teacher was forthcoming, while other teachers were unwilling to engage. This school was discarded and another was identified through a similar process and approach. This resulted in a delay in the identification of the third case-study school. The final three case-study schools identified included one voluntary secondary school and two community colleges from the vocational sector. It was not possible to engage a community or comprehensive school. The voluntary secondary school was a single sex boys' school while the community colleges were co-educational.

The case-study schools

The schools were ascribed fictitious names to protect the identities of all the participants and that of the wider school community. The schools were renamed as St Anthony's College, Bradfield College, and Castlecourt College.

St Anthony's is a community college that is managed by the local education authority: the vocational education committee (VEC). The school is located in a suburban area with an expanding population. This school, with an enrolment of upwards of 700 students, serves primarily an urban catchment area, is co-educational, and offers a comprehensive curriculum.

Castlecourt College is also a community college under the management of a VEC. The school, with an enrolment of just under 500 students, is also located in an urban setting and, although enrolment is primarily from the surrounding suburban housing estates, the school also serves a significant rural hinterland. The school is included in the Department of Education and Skills' action plan: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) to combat educational disadvantage. The action plan provides additional resources to the school in the form of programmes, staffing and funding to address levels of social and economic disadvantage experienced by students in the community. Castlecourt has a reduced pupil-teacher ratio, a home-school-community-liaison (HSCL) post, and offers the Junior Certificate School programme (JCSP) and a school completion programme (SCP). All of these initiatives are designed to support students' attendance, retention and progression through Castlecourt College. The school is co-educational and also offers a comprehensive curriculum.

Bradfield College is a single-sex voluntary secondary school for boys, also located in an urban setting. The school, established for over fifty years, has experienced a gradual increase in enrolment towards 400 students. Bradfield offers a more limited curriculum that does not include practical subjects including Materials Technology (Wood) (MTW), Metalwork, Engineering, Construction Studies or Home Economics.

The principal of each school was asked to seek the voluntary engagement of teachers and that of the student council liaison teacher. Following requests from the principal and the placing of the initial letter in the notice board in each staffroom, just two teachers volunteered to engage with student voice in their classroom from the staff of Bradfield College. Three teachers volunteered from Castlecourt College, followed by four teachers from St Anthony's College. These nine teachers became central participants in the research and have been given fictitious names to conceal their identities.

All three student council liaison teachers readily volunteered to engage with the research. In two of the schools, the student council liaison teachers insisted that the council itself, using its democratic and representative mandate, should decide on its own participation in the research project. The councils in St Anthony's College and Castlecourt College held meetings and invited this researcher to discuss the research project with them. Following some discussion within the

councils, both agreed to engage. The involvement of Bradfield College student council was agreed between the principal and the student council liaison teacher and was announced to the council at their first meeting in the presence of this researcher.

Meetings were held initially with the groups of teachers who volunteered from each school. Separate meetings were held with the student council liaison teachers. The background to the study and the research questions were outlined and discussed, as were the methods and timeframes involved in completing the research. Teachers were asked to identify two class groups, one for each phase of the study period. The subject areas chosen were dependent on the teacher's qualification and assignment through timetabling. The individual class group was the choice of the teacher.

Concerns from teachers relating to student voice as dialogic consultation emerged immediately relating to trust, the erosion of traditional hierarchical positioning of student and teacher, relationships, and pressure on class time to complete programmes of work and prepare for examinations. All the teachers were apprehensive about engaging with their students in dialogic consultation and feared that written responses might be critical, negative or undermining of the teacher's authority.

The pilot study

The principal aim of the pilot study or trial completed in advance was to ensure that the research instruments and data gathering focused particularly on capturing the views and opinions of the students and teachers in the context of consultation and student voice, and equally on capturing changes in practice and attitude arising from student voice. Pilot testing of the research instruments and their administration provide insights into the reliability and validity of the research design (Berends, 2006). Piloting also facilitates testing of the timing, order, relevance and differentiation of questions and prompts both on questionnaires and in interviews (Mertens, 2005). Feedback from participants and analysis of the pilot data assisted in refining the instruments.

Piloting focused on the quality of the questions, their structure, the range of possible answers, the clarity of the language, and the tone of the questions in the questionnaires, interviews and the prompts for reflection. The piloting process also sought the opinion and reaction of the teachers particularly on the questionnaires for students. Due to the difficulty in engaging schools and teachers in the research project, it was not possible to identify schools other than the case-study schools already engaged, to pilot the project. Pilot testing of the research instruments and

interviews took place in two of these schools in the school year prior to the main study period (see **Table 5.1**) as the identification of the third school had been delayed.

Six teachers agreed to pilot the research instruments. The piloting period involved a three-month engagement with these schools and teachers to discuss the project and to familiarise the teachers with the research instruments. The pilot-study period also involved the teachers engaging in the dialogic consultation with their students over a three-week study period of lessons with their class groups at that time to test the process and the instruments and to complete their individual reflective diaries. The process was discussed in detail with the teachers in each school as a group, and their reactions and comments were gathered at subsequent meetings. One teacher agreed to be interviewed, as did one student council liaison teacher to pilot the semi-structured interview schedules.

Discussion with teachers during the pilot phase was extremely valuable in establishing their reaction to the use of dialogic consultation and questionnaires in their classroom. While teachers were comfortable with the dialogic discussion with their students they were very concerned, in the pilot phase, that the students would perceive the questionnaire as a type of customer survey, which they might use to evaluate and compare or rate their teachers. The teachers initially rejected the direct questions posed to students in the questionnaires relating to what the students liked or disliked in their classroom experiences. A number of the teachers insisted on alternative questions that focused on the students' engagement and learning, rather than the perceived focus on teaching and the approach of the teacher. Some of the teachers felt threatened by these questions and professionally exposed by what the students might say.

The intention of the researcher was to design a questionnaire that would trace the students' reactions to changes in pedagogy arising from engagement with student voice but one that would not threaten the professional identity of the teachers. To address these concerns, the initial student questionnaire was significantly altered to create just one overarching prompt question. The emphasis of the question focused on practice and experience in the classroom rather than on the practice of the individual teacher at a particular point in time. Interestingly, no such changes were requested in the reflective sheet for students that provided focused prompts relating to students' views and perceptions of their experiences of classroom practices.

When the teachers read the responses of students in the pilot phase they were particularly surprised by the positive and constructive nature of the students' commentary and their fears were allayed in relation to the personalisation of the responses.

Following the pilot study, the teacher diaries were also examined. These revealed some variation in the emphasis and approach used by teachers to reflect on their experience of student voice in their classroom. In some cases, the diary was used simply as a narrative to describe and recount experiences in the classroom and lacked any depth of reflection on those experiences. Prompts were therefore provided in the diaries to scaffold teacher reflections during the main study period (see **Appendix 1**).

The outcome of the pilot exercise was therefore very positive. It began a trusting relationship between the researcher and the participants and also identified the need for revision of the questions in the initial student questionnaire, and to refinements to the teacher diary, the interview schedules, and the methods of interviewing. It also pointed to the significance of the student reflection sheet in capturing the students' perspectives on any changes in their classroom experience arising from the engagement of student voice.

The fieldwork

In the classroom

Fieldwork was undertaken over the period of one school year from September to June. In researching student voice in the classroom during this period, the nine teachers in the three case-study schools undertook two phases of the research involving the use of dialogic consultation, questionnaires and reflections with their students (**Table 5.1**). Following the pilot study, teachers in each case-study school met with the researcher in advance of each phase to discuss the process and develop a shared understanding of how the dialogic consultation should operate and a willingness to adjust classroom practice based on student voice.

Table 5.1: *Outline of Fieldwork Activity*

In advance: Year 1 - September to December	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telephone calls and letters to school principals • Selection of 3 schools • Meeting with each school principal and with teacher groups in each school • Meeting with student council liaison teachers 	
Pilot phase: Year 1 - February to May	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot planning with two schools, six teachers and six class groups • Preparation of pilot instruments and permission letters • Separate pilot interviews with one teacher and one student council liaison teacher • Meetings with teachers • Analysis of pilot returns and revision of instruments 	
In-school phase 1: Year 2 - September to December	
Student voice in the classroom	Student voice in the student council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings with nine teachers in all three schools for phase 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings with the student council in all three schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogic consultation followed by teaching in all nine classrooms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-going attendance and observation of student council meetings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase 1 interviews with student groups and teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with student council executive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examination of phase 1 questionnaires, reflections and interviews and teacher diary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-going attendance and observation of student council meetings
In-school phase 2: Year 2 - February to June	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with the nine teachers • Discussion of phase 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-going attendance and observation of student council meetings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogic consultation followed by teaching in all nine classrooms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with student council executive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase 2 interviews with student focus groups and teachers in all three schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with student council liaison teacher and school principal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion and return of questionnaires, reflections, and teacher diary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion and return of student council reflection sheets
Follow-up phase: Year 3 - May	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribution of 'one year on' questionnaire to the nine teachers, 100% response 	

Each teacher selected one class group on their timetable, in a subject of their choice, and selected a unit of work from their curricular plan. The teacher initiated a discussion with the class group relating to their experience in their classroom based on an agreed prompt sheet to scaffold the dialogic consultation (see **Appendix 3**). This was followed by the completion of the aforementioned student questionnaire (see **Appendix 1**). The teachers then engaged with their students over a number of weeks based on the commentary of their students as expressed orally in the discussion and as written on the questionnaire. The teacher distributed a second questionnaire and the reflective sheets as the unit of study was completed (see **Appendix 1**). The teachers also completed reflective diary entries as the phases progressed. Each teacher repeated this process with a different class group in phase two of the research period.

As depicted in **Table 5.2**, Mathematics, English, History, Geography, Science, Economics, Physical Education (PE) Sports Science, and CSPE were the subjects chosen for inclusion in the research by the participating teachers. Across the three case-study schools, class groups from all year groups in junior cycle and senior cycle were represented, as were two Transition Year (TY) groups. Teachers were encouraged to engage with a different subject, programme or cycle in phase two, where possible, to widen the pedagogical engagement with student voice, to focus on any possible subject or programme specific issues in each case, and to identify any issues that teachers might experience in using student voice in a range of areas of student experience.

Table 5.2: *Case-study schools, teachers, subjects and class groups*

Case 1: St Anthony's Community College		
Teacher	Phase 1: Subject and class group	Phase 2: Subject and class group
Ian	Science – 2 nd year	Science – 2 nd year
Edward	Sports Science module – TY Group 1	Sports Science module – TY Group 2
Hilda	CSPE – 2 nd year	CSPE – 2 nd year
Ultan	English – 2 nd year	English – 5 th year
Case 2: Bradfield College		
Teacher	Phase 1: Subject and class group	Phase 2: Subject and class group
Finbarr	Economics – 5 th year	Mathematics – 6 th year
Declan	History – 1 st year	History - TY
Case 3: Castlecourt College		
Teacher	Phase 1: Subject and class group	Phase 2: Subject and class group
Darina	Geography – 2 nd year JCSP	Geography – 3 rd year
Tom	Geography – 2 nd year (group 1)	Geography – 2 nd year (group 2)
Ita	Geography – 5 th year	Mathematics – 2 nd year

The teachers, on completion of each phase, passed the questionnaires and reflective sheets, completed by their students to the researcher. The completed teacher reflective diaries were reviewed following phase one, returned to each teacher, who then completed a second reflective diary during phase 2. Both diaries were then passed to the researcher on completion of phase two. Interviews with the teachers were completed during phase one and on completion of phase two. Interviews with the focus group of students from each participating class group were completed following each phase of their involvement in the research (**see Appendix 2**). Each interview was audio recorded for later transcription, coding and analysis.

With the student council

Fieldwork with the three student councils began with separate meetings with the student council liaison teacher and with the three councils. The work of the council was observed at three or four meetings throughout the year as they progressed their agenda. The researcher took notes at each meeting, listening to the issues under discussion and observed the interactions between the

members and the role taken by the student council liaison teacher. These observations provided prompts for the interview with the members of the executive of each council at the beginning and towards the end of the school year, and for interviews with the principal and student council liaison teacher in each case-study school. Each of these interviews was also audio recorded. The student council members also completed reflection sheets on their engagement with their council towards the end of the study period.

Summary of data gathered

Tables 5.3 – 5.6 below, itemise the data gathered relating to student voice in the classroom including eighteen focus group interviews with students, eighteen teacher interviews, nine teacher reflective diaries for each of the two phases, 725 student questionnaires and 388 student reflection sheets. Twenty-six student council members were interviewed within focus groups. The three teachers acting as student council liaison teacher and the school principals in the case-study schools were also interviewed. Council executive members completed twenty-six reflection sheets.

Table 5.3: Data gathered St Anthony's Community College

Case 1: St Anthony's Community College				
Teacher name	Phase 1: Subject and class group	Data gathered	Phase 2: Subject and class group	Data gathered
Ian	Science – 2 nd year	Questionnaires: 47 Reflections: 24 Students' interview: 1 Teacher interview: 1 Teacher diary: 1	Science – 2 nd year	Questionnaires: 45 Reflections: 22 Students' interview: 1 Teacher interview: 1 Teacher diary: 1
Edward	Sports Science module – TY Group 1	Questionnaires: 50 Reflections: 28 Students' interview: 1 Teacher interview: 1 Teacher diary: 1	Sports Science module – TY Group 2	Questionnaires: 43 Reflections: 18 Students' interview: 1 Teacher interview: 1 Teacher diary: 1
Hilda	CSPE – 2 nd year	Questionnaires: 41 Reflections: 24 Students' interview: 1 Teacher interview: 1 Teacher diary: 1	CSPE – 2 nd year	Questionnaires: 42 Reflections: 23 Students' interview: 1 Teacher interview: 1 Teacher diary: 1
Ultan	English – 2 nd year	Questionnaires: 39 Reflections: 20 Students' interview: 1 Teacher interview: 1 Teacher diary: 1	English – 5 th year	Questionnaires: 37 Reflections: 8 Students' interview: 1 Teacher interview: 1 Teacher diary: 1
Student Council		Reflections: 5 Students' interview: 2 SCLT interview: 1 Principal interview: 1		
Totals:	Phase 1		Phase 2	
Case 1	Teacher interviews: 5 Student interviews: 5 Questionnaires: 177 Student reflections: 96 Student council reflections: 5 Teacher reflective diaries: 4		Teacher interviews: 4 Student interviews: 5 Questionnaires: 167 Student reflections: 71 Teacher reflective diaries: 4 Principal interview: 1	

Table 5.4: Data gathered Bradfield College

Case 2: Bradfield College				
Teacher	Phase 1: Subject and class group	Data gathered	Phase 2: Subject and class group	Data gathered
Finbarr	Economics – 5 th year	Questionnaires: 38 Reflections: 14 Students' interview: 1 Teacher interview: 1 Teacher diary: 1	Mathematics – 6 th year	Questionnaires: 47 Reflections: 26 Students' interview: 1 Teacher interview: 1 Teacher diary: 1
Declan	History – 1 st year	Questionnaires: 37 Reflections: 16 Students' interview: 1 Teacher interview: 1 Teacher diary: 1	History - TY	Questionnaires: 27 Reflections: 16 Students' interview: 1 Teacher interview: 1 Teacher diary: 1
Student Council		Reflections: 10 Students' interview: 2 SCLT interview: 1 Principal interview: 1		
Totals:	Phase 1		Phase 2	
Case 2	Teacher interviews: 3 Student interviews: 3 Questionnaires: 75 Student reflections: 40 Student council reflections: 10 Teacher reflective diaries: 2		Teacher interviews: 2 Student interviews: 3 Questionnaires: 74 Student reflections: 44 Teacher reflective diaries: 2 Principal interview: 1	

Table 5.5: Data gathered Castlecourt College

Case 3: Castlecourt College				
Teacher	Phase 1: Subject and class group	Data gathered	Phase 2: Subject and class group	Data gathered
Darina	Geography – 2 nd year JCSP	Questionnaires: 30 Reflections: 15 Students' interview: 1 Teacher interview: 1 Teacher diary: 1	Geography – 3 rd year	Questionnaires: 46 Reflections: 22 Students' interview: 1 Teacher interview: 1 Teacher diary: 1
Tom	Geography – 2 nd year (group 1)	Questionnaires: 40 Reflections: 20 Students' interview: 1 Teacher interview: 1 Teacher diary: 1	Geography – 2 nd year (group 2)	Questionnaires: 38 Reflections: 18 Students' interview: 1 Teacher interview: 1 Teacher diary: 1
Ita	Geography – 5 th year	Questionnaires: 49 Reflections: 24 Students' interview: 1 Teacher interview: 1 Teacher diary: 1	Mathematics – 2 nd year	Questionnaires: 29 Reflections: 27 Students' interview: 1 Teacher interview: 1 Teacher diary: 1
Student Council		Reflections: 11 Students' interview: 2 SCLT interview: 1 Principal interview: 1		
Totals:	Phase 1		Phase 2	
Case 3	Teacher interviews: 4 Student interviews: 4 Questionnaires: 119 Student reflections: 70 Student council reflections: 11 Teacher reflective diaries: 3		Teacher interviews: 3 Student interviews: 4 Questionnaires: 113 Student reflections: 67 Teacher reflective diaries: 3 Principal interview: 1	

Table 5.6: Combined totals for data sources gathered

Combined totals for data sources gathered in all cases	Teacher interviews	21
	Student interviews	24
	Principal interviews	3
	Questionnaires*	725*
	Student reflections	388
	Student council reflections	26
	Teacher reflective diaries	18
	Email questionnaire 'one year on' – teachers	9

* Questionnaire numbers combine questionnaire 1 and 2 for each class group

'One year on'

One year after the main study period, the nine teachers were again contacted by email requesting completion of a short semi-structured questionnaire seeking information relating to their current pedagogical practice, their continued use of student voice in their classrooms and their views on consulting students following the experience of the research project. All nine teachers responded by completing this questionnaire (see **Appendix 4**).

Positioning the researcher

From the outset, the profession of the researcher as a post-primary inspector with the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills was made clear to those participating in the research. It was also made clear that the research had no connection with inspection and was not linked nor would it inform any future evaluations that might be undertaken in these schools. The participants accepted these guarantees.

The role of this researcher as a school inspector however, did present some issues for the schools and teachers involved in the study. These issues were primarily manifest in the unwillingness of teachers to facilitate the researcher to observe the dialogic consultation in the classroom as proposed at the initial meeting with the teachers in the pilot phase. Some of the teachers were concerned that their teaching would be evaluated as they had experienced both subject inspection and whole-school evaluation (WSE) in the past. The teachers openly expressed their willingness to engage with the research but were clearly unwilling to allow the researcher to be present in their classroom to observe their consultation and dialogue with their students. While the role of the researcher was outlined and anonymity guaranteed, it was clear that some of the teachers were unwilling or unable to initially separate the roles of researcher and inspector.

From the outset, in both written and oral communication, a reflexive focus and an awareness of the role and identity of the researcher were required. While the objectivity of the researcher was fore fronted, as was the separation of the research from any form of external evaluation, the reflexive nature of the process was acknowledged. As the goodwill of the teachers was paramount to the completion of the research, the issue of classroom observation was not pursued and a focus on trust and communication was emphasised. In one case, access to the school was restricted except by permission of the principal in advance of each visit. This school principal also insisted on the requirement to have a teacher present during student focus group interviews. The other schools placed no such conditions on engagement with students and provided open access to the school through contact with the individual teachers rather than the necessity to seek access through the principal on each occasion.

The perception of the researcher as inspector informed these issues. A tension between an openness and willingness of teachers to partake and suspicion of the inspector's evaluative gaze was manifest. This tension was accommodated and mediated through the pilot period and the initial engagement with phase one of the research through dialogue, transparency and professional courtesy. This process established trust between the researcher and the participants and tension disappeared as the research progressed. No reference was made to such issues in teachers' diaries.

Throughout the research period, in the context of interactions with participants, reflexivity in the context of the potential perception of the power positioning of the researcher was fore fronted and addressed in the context of language, tone, dress and speech in attempting to ameliorate this issue. Similar considerations informed the language, tone and structure of the research instruments and the data analysis.

Challenges and constraints in data gathering

As case-study research, the key challenges that emerged were the tension between the voluntary engagement of the teachers in a new area of practice, that of engaging student voice through dialogic consultation, and the requirement for some distance to be kept from the classroom by this researcher. These challenges were not manifest in relation to engagement with the student council or the student council liaison teacher.

The insecurity of the participating teachers, their unwillingness to allow their classroom practice to be observed and the need to progress the research with care and caution became key concerns from the outset. It became clear that the classroom space was sacred to the teacher and observation of practice by a researcher was not permitted. Therefore, the detail of the dialogic consultation, the discussion, its contextualisation and the level of guidance provided by the teacher remained within the confines of the classroom community and the student-teacher relationship. Researching practice in the classroom in this context was achieved through hearing the voices of the students in their written and oral accounts of the dialogic consultation and the classroom activities that they subsequently experienced. Arguably, the presence of a researcher within this situated and contextualised situation may have affected the normalised behaviours of student and teacher that have developed based on relationship and trust.

The general insecurity of the teachers was addressed by maximising the contact and communication between researcher and teacher participants through meetings, telephone and email contact as the research phases progressed. This allowed the researcher to hear from the teachers,

encourage the agreed procedure and to engage with their reactions and experiences. The teacher interview following phase one also allowed for a discussion of the process in addition to the teachers' experiences of student voice in their classrooms. This was further triangulated during the second teacher interview, on completion of phase two.

Other realities of the study included the need to select schools and teachers based on their willingness to voluntarily engage in the project. The selection of class groups and subjects was therefore consequent on the teachers' subject specialisms and on their choice of class group. The teachers were encouraged to choose randomly from their available class groups and to use student voice within their normal planned teaching as opposed to staging a particular event to assist the research. The influence and control of the principal in some cases was also evident. The extent to which the principal encouraged, facilitated or discouraged participation by some teachers is unknown and unknowable in the context of this research. The teachers that signalled their intention to engage became the participants. Similarly, the influence of the principal on the student council, and on the student council liaison teacher, to engage, or on the level or limitation of that engagement and participation is also unknown and unknowable.

As outlined above, in one case-study school, the principal insisted that a teacher should always be present at focus-group interviews with students. Compliance with child safety procedures was cited as the reason for this condition. A teacher volunteered to sit in the classroom as these interviews were conducted and recorded. These teachers remained at a distance and while present, did not overtly intervene. This condition was not mentioned or required in the other case-study schools.

A further challenge for the research was the achievement of a shared understanding of student voice by the teacher participants in relation to their classroom practice. All the teacher participants signalled that they had no experience of the concept of student voice or of consultation with students. To address this and to achieve a shared understanding, the concept was discussed and the typologies, motivations and challenges of student voice as represented by the research literature were presented to teachers over a number of meetings. Discussion, conversation and interrogation of the topic emerged particularly in relation to the impact of the process on the teachers' established practice and on their perception by their students in light of facilitating their voice through dialogic consultation. These engagements aimed to achieve some uniformity of approach to the process but also stressed the qualitative and social nature of the engagement and the need to preserve the cultural richness and variability of the dialogue between student and teacher within the school and classroom culture. The aforementioned prompt sheet (**Appendix 3**) was produced

following these engagements to support and ensure broad consistency in their engagement particularly in the key period of the dialogic consultation with the students.

The research instruments presented yet another challenge. Ironically the pilot phase did not facilitate the students to voice their views on the research instruments. The researcher could not engage with the student's voices in advance to discuss the research instruments, their language and focus. The teachers reported on the process and on their students' reaction to the instruments and the aforementioned changes were made to the initial student questionnaire. The absence of a student voice relating to the research instruments further reflected the teachers' initial insecurity. Thus, the inability to access students was accepted due to the need to maintain a positive relationship with the participating teachers and the need to progress the research within the reality of the school and classroom routines of the teachers and the case-study schools.

The challenges of this multi-dimensional research primarily referencing the perceived insecurity of teachers, and the change in their positioning and identity in the school, is reflected in student voice research (Arnot and Reay, 2007; Devine, 2003a; Nieto, 1994; Rudduck, 2005). Within this context, it is argued that the teachers in these case-study schools were conflicted by student voice as a change in the established discourse of largely silent students. They were conflicted by their insecurity relating to what new or alternative commentary might emerge and by the perceived change in their teacher identity from one of power and control, in line with their teacher colleagues, to one moving towards shared dialogic consultation with students (Kan, 2011; Rudduck, 2007). The teachers were equally conflicted by the pressure of the timetable, curriculum, and the established expectations of teacher expertise in examination preparation strategies. This reflected the almost universal resistance by teachers to using final-year, senior-cycle class groups, who were preparing for Leaving Certificate examination, in the student voice project.

Each of these challenges and constraints affected the nature of the research design within the culture and community that was the case-study schools and classrooms. Changes in the planned design of the research in the context of classroom observation and structure of the research instruments emerged from the pilot study and from the regular interactions with the participants. However, the challenges and constraints also point to the complexity of the issues of power, control and identity within school culture that become sub plots in the student voice drama.

Ethical issues

Ethical considerations informed the research design from the outset. Overarching ethical considerations in educational research concern social improvement and beneficence, justice and respect, the protection of the vulnerable, and the maintenance of rigour and integrity in the research (Mertens, 2005; Strike, 2006). Ethical responsibility in research primarily concerns the safety, well-being and informed consent of the participants to engage with the research. The related issues of accuracy, honesty, courtesy and humanity in relation to participants, and the elimination of bias are viewed as the critical ethical concerns in qualitative research (Merriam, 1998). Attention to such concerns ensures reliability and validity in the research data, analysis and outcomes. Concern for issues of data gathering and fieldwork including the recording of voices, interviews, the use of quotations, anonymity, informed consent and permissions, are equally highlighted (Richards and Morse, 2007). Issues of trust relating to interaction with students and teachers and in interpreting data provided to the researcher when at a remove from the classroom are also raised in any consideration of ethics in qualitative research. However, the necessity to engage with a range of perspectives over a significant time references both ethical practice and validity in qualitative research (Clark and Moss, 1996; LeCompte, Preissle and Tesch, 1993). Equally, a clear and transparent ethical focus in research, engaging with students and teachers, facilitates flexibility in the gathering instruments and in the interpretation of data leading to findings (Clark and Moss, 1996). Trust is therefore developed through ethical behaviour and by engaging with and valuing the perspective of the participants. Ethics and validity are therefore linked in the context of this research.

Ethical considerations reflecting the rights and emancipatory theoretical framing of this research are echoed in the concern that silenced voices will be heard, that issues of power in all aspects of its relationship to the participants are fore fronted, as are the resulting actions and empowerments (Mertens, 2005).

Ethical issues in this research primarily concerned the related areas of the participation of students under the age of eighteen, their teachers and the school principal. Related areas for ethical consideration included access to schools by an external researcher, the conduct and location of interviews, how the research instruments were used, and the nature of interactions between the researcher and the adult and child participants. Equally, ethics relating to the research design, piloting, fieldwork methodology, the positioning of the researcher, validity and the risk of bias were of further concern. Data handling, analysis, storage and presentation were of ethical concern.

From the outset, these ethical issues relating to the participants were addressed methodically and meticulously. In the first instance, the research instruments and process received ethical clearance from the Social Research Ethics Committee, University College Cork (see **Appendix 5**). Informed consent was central to each stage of the research process. Written consent for engagement with the research was sought and received from school principals, teachers, parents and students (see **Appendix 6**). Guarantees concerning the anonymity of participants, confidentiality relating to access to written documents and other data, and dissemination of the findings were also provided. Appropriate arrangements were made with schools for student interviews concerning location and recording. The students' comfort and willingness to engage were addressed as was the language, nature, tone and pace of questioning and discussion in interviews. Similar arrangements were in place for teacher and principal interviews. Guarantees relating to the storage and accessibility of written and audio data whether in a raw state or in analysed format were also addressed, as was the disposal of this data. Participants were also fully aware that they could withdraw their consent to participate.

Issues relating to the selection of schools, teachers, class groups and the student council have already been outlined. Ethical practice was strictly adhered to in ensuring trust, uniformity of approach and a shared understanding of the process. The balance between the personal engagement of the researcher with the teachers within each case and the necessary distance of the researcher from the classroom engagement was given continual attention. Within this qualitative research, the gaining and maintenance of the trust of the teachers and the student council liaison teachers was paramount. This was achieved through positive, clear and effective practice guided by careful attention to ethics.

Analysis of data

For practitioner orientated researchers, interested in an issue that represents a basic concern in a local context and inspires inductive and 'practice-near work', grounded theory work that tries to develop a locally relevant theory is a crucial project

(Alvesson and Kärreman, 2011, p. 24).

Grounded theory forms the framework for the data analysis and for the emergence of the key findings of this research. The metaphor of discovery linked to careful and detailed analysis of data by the researcher describes a grounded theory approach (*ibid.*). It facilitates the researcher to explore the issues, processes and boundaries that surround the concept or phenomenon (Charmaz, 2006). Through a focus on process and on understanding reality as socially constructed, grounded

theory requires the researcher to interact closely with both the data gathering and the data as gathered, but equally to view the reflexive nature of that interaction (Richards and Morse, 2007).

A grounded theory study attempts to account for the centrality of the core concept by telling the story of its emergence

(*ibid.*, p. 62).

Data analysis based on developing theory or emerging theoretical propositions requires constant questioning of the data during the fieldwork and as analysis of data progresses. This process, using constant comparative methods, requires systematic coding to identify patterns and incidents leading to emerging themes. These emerging theoretical propositions are then questioned to interrogate and illustrate the nature, complexity and variety of the relationships and issues that surround the phenomenon (Mertens, 2005).

Respondent validation, extending from response-guided experimentation (Edgington, 1992) facilitates the constant questioning of the data through engagement with the respondents and their responses to emergent findings. Respondent validation is used in case-study research to allow respondents' perspectives on the emerging nature of the findings to be included within a grounded theory, data-analysis framework and therefore to reflect the constructed nature of the findings and emergent theory (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2011). The inclusion of respondent validation can also confer further rigour and credibility to the research findings (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). Equally however, prolonged observation, sustained reflexivity and triangulation (Mertens, 2005) can also provide appropriate rigour and validity to the research and data analysis. Competing or contested interpretations by respondents, issues of trust between respondents and the researcher, and issues of confidentiality can limit or call into question the effectiveness of such respondent validation (Lacey and Luff, 2001).

Given the aforementioned challenges of engaging teachers and schools in this research, and the teachers' insecurity in relation to dialogic consultation, informal respondent validation was undertaken with the participant teachers through individual discussion of their experiences and through ongoing communication and contact with the researcher during the pilot phase and in the period between phase one and phase two of the research period. Tangible outcomes of this informal respondent validation included the teachers' positive responses to the students' commentary in the pilot phase, and their growing enthusiasm to engage with the research as phases one and two progressed. Informal respondent validation also assisted in achieving and maintaining the aforementioned shared understanding of student voice and the process of dialogic consultation in the classroom. This also resulted in a deeper exploration of varying emergent patterns in the data analysis particularly relating the interpretation of dialogic consultation by two of the participating teachers. These interpretations are discussed in Chapter 6.

Within a grounded theory approach, data analysis is systematic and in the first instance requires comprehensive open coding based on a line-by-line analysis of each data source. Open coding identifies categories of information that emerge from the data sources and then to filter and distil each of the categories to identify a set of themes that arises from the data to reflect the process or concept under study.

Following the open coding process, axial coding identifies the central categories or premise, theme or themes arising from the data and explores relationships, context, interactions and consequences within the data relating to these key themes or categories. A matrix of the issues, elements, or consequences will emerge from the analysis that can then be interrogated. The axial coding process therefore identifies the dynamics of the central themes or categories, explores their causes and consequences, and identifies related actions, potential interventions, and possible consequences (Mertens, 2005).

The range of data sources gathered from each case-study school, classroom and student council, as outlined in **Tables 5.3 – 5.6**, reflect the rich data sources required for a grounded theory based data analysis. Student questionnaires, student, teacher and principal interviews, teacher reflective diaries, student reflective sheets and observation of meetings allowed for the close analysis and interrogation of data towards an exploration and understanding of the visibility, motivation, issues, consequences, affordances and constraints of student voice in each of these cases study schools.

Coding

On completion of the data gathering and interaction with the case-study schools over one school year, the initial engagement with data analysis began with the transcription of all sources to facilitate the use of constant comparative methods. The audio-recorded interviews for students, teachers, school principals and student council liaison teacher were transcribed. The students' responses in the questionnaires and reflection sheets were also transcribed and placed on Excel sheets for coding and analysis. The teachers' reflective diaries were also transcribed for coding and analysis. Notes from the observation of student council meetings and the researcher's notes taken throughout the data-gathering period were transcribed for analysis alongside other sources.

Each source was then open coded on a line-by-line basis to identify the extent to which categories and themes emerged from the data and identified their priority and importance. The emergence of identifiable and significant themes or issues also facilitated triangulation across the range of sources. Triangulation allowed for the interrogation of emerging themes between teacher

interviews and their diaries, between student questionnaires responses, their reflection sheets and student interviews, and between the emergent themes from the principal, student council liaison teacher and the student council interviews. Axial coding then allowed for the exploration of these emergent themes. These were interrogated within each case and between the sources provided by the participants in that case followed by a cross-case analysis. The engagement of the researcher with the data through these methods of constant comparison and analysis combined with researcher reflection and reflexivity continuously questioned and challenged emergent findings of the study. (**Appendix 7**) presents some illustrative examples of the initial open coding process).

This careful and meticulous coding identified patterns in the students' narrative relating to their teachers and to their experiences in class. These patterns, as findings, were captured through line-by-line coding of questionnaire responses and reflections that revealed the in-class dialogic consultation and the resultant classroom experiences. The findings were then triangulated with the experiences of the teachers and students as expressed in their interview transcripts. Analysis of diary entries provided a further layer of insight on the teachers' perspective on their experience of student voice. Similarly, analysis and coding of reflections, interviews and notes on the observation of student council meetings identified patterns and emergent themes in the operation, and in the students' experience of student voice as reflected in the student council construct. Cross-case analysis allowed for the emergence of overarching themes and categories from the data gathered as key findings relating to the research questions.

Conclusion

And so the stage is set. The research design behind the drama of voice, as outlined, is qualitative, is case-study based, and data analysis is framed within grounded theory. This research design reflects the central research questions based on a theorisation of student voice from a democratic, rights-based and emancipatory perspective within a constructivist and socio-cultural framework. Grounded theory provides a framework for data analysis based on rich data sources researched within the interrelationships and interactions of the participants in the situated social context of post-primary schools and classrooms.

The range of methods, positioned within approved ethical practices, involved the use of questionnaires, interviews, reflection, and observation to gather the students' and teachers' perspectives on student voice as dialogic consultation in classrooms and through the student council. The main data gathering was completed in three case-study schools, in two phases, over one school year. The wide range of data sources; the prolonged nature of the research period; the

on-going analysis and review of findings, and the triangulation between sources was used to validate the emergent findings.

The identification of case-study schools, the piloting of the research instruments and the extensive data-gathering process presented particular challenges that were addressed. The positioning of the researcher, as a school inspector and reflexivity in relation to interactions, data gathering and data analysis were to the fore throughout the data-gathering phase. Fieldwork involved regular and direct engagement with the principal, teachers and students of the case study schools over the research period. Observation of classroom practice and of the process of dialogic consultation however, was not possible. Detailed transcription, coding and analysis of the range of data allowed for the emergence of key patterns and themes relating to student voice that facilitated an analysis of the complexity of issues that surround, interact with, and impact upon the emergence of student voice in post-primary schools.

And so the drama of voices begins...

Part III

A Drama of Voices



Chapter 6 – Student Voice: a Drama of Experience

Prologue

Act I: The Students' Voices

Act II: The Teachers' Voices

Act III: Student Voice and the Student Council

Epilogue: The Greek Chorus

Student Voice in Irish Post-Primary Schools

A drama of voices

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Students from eighteen classrooms in three case-study schools; Students in three student councils; nine subject teachers; three student council liaison teachers & three school principals

DRAMATIS LOCI

St Anthony's College, Bradfield College & Castlecourt College

DRAMATIC INSIDIAMINI

Prologue

A drama of experience is created. The scene is set as the backdrop and script of pedagogy, curriculum, examination and evaluation, within which students and teachers engage in their classrooms, is developed. The effects of these forces in shaping and defining the roles of the actors and the evolving plot are set out. The evolution of the student council construct as a dramatic device is also introduced as an element of student voice in each school setting.

Act I

The students in the classroom take centre stage. Their stories emerge as they describe their experience in their classroom. They articulate their new experience of being consulted, their comments for change, and the changes they encountered. The pressure of the syllabus and examination in shaping their expectation and experience of pedagogy is revealed.

Act II

The teachers then voice their story. They speak of consultation, of requests for changes by students, of the pressures of curriculum and examination, and of their reflection. The changes that they made in their pedagogy following the consultation, and the boundaries and challenges to their power and authority that the voices of the students presented, are revealed. The impact of student voice and of their sustained engagement with dialogic consultation emerges.

Act III

A sub plot develops on the stage. The student council members come forward as the keepers of the flame of student voice. Their experiences and the roles of the liaison teachers and school principals are articulated. The effect of the student council as a construct for consultation, dialogue, democratic practice and active citizenship is played out on stage.

Epilogue - The Greek Chorus

The Greek Chorus decipher the complex plot of voice, relationship, identity, pedagogy, curriculum and examination as recounted in the student voice drama. The student council stands up for robust interrogation as the voice for students in the wider school community. The outcome of the student voice experience comes into view as the final curtain falls.



Chapter 6 – Student Voice: a drama of experience.

Prologue

Introduction

THE PEDAGOGICAL EXPERIENCES of the students in eighteen classrooms in the three case-study schools were formed by an amalgam of teacher identity, pedagogy, policy discourse, curriculum discourse and the archaeology of experience, reflecting a pedagogical script as ‘a long process of accretion and sedimentation or hybridisation’ (Alexander, 2008, p. 84). The layers accumulated through time based on policy, discourse and lived experience in an ever-changing pedagogic setting (Leach and Moon, 2008).

In our role as teachers we may plan, dream and initiate process, but its nature is only defined and sustained across time through the unfolding and shared interactions, dispositions, beliefs, practices, activities and interconnected learning trajectories of ourselves and our learners

(*ibid.*, p. 170).

The ‘dispositions, beliefs [and] ‘practices’ that have shaped the classroom experiences of teachers and students in the Irish classroom arguably combine curriculum ideology, the related evolution of pedagogical discourse over time, and the rhetoric and enactment of policy. These have created a situated drama that is performed between the students and teacher within each classroom.

This research introduced student voice into that classroom drama. Motivation for student voice points to a student’s right to have a voice in matters that affect them in that classroom, with an expectation that their views will at least be listened to and afforded due consideration (Lundy, 2007). Such a motivation for student voice in this study cannot be challenged by external agendas of performativity, control or accountability as was the case in English schools (Burke, 2007; Fielding, 2004b, 2011; Lodge 2005, 2008; Rudduck, 2002; Rudduck and Fielding, 2006; Thomson and Gunter, 2007) as such agendas are not features on the educational landscape in Ireland.

The teachers in this research granted a student voice of dialogue and consultation to their students as a privilege. Students’ voice however, is central to a social constructivist framing of pedagogy. In such classrooms the student’s voice is heard in engagement, participation and interaction as students respond and partake through talk, cooperation and co-construction of knowledge. The teacher’s voice directs, scaffolds and facilitates students’ active engagement and participation.

Student voice, as a concept, adds dialogic consultation to this theoretical framing of pedagogy. Hence, the voice of the student in classroom talk and in dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2008) is expanded to one of dialogic consultation. Students are therefore facilitated to comment, suggest changes, and challenge their experience of pedagogy. An emergent critical pedagogy has the potential to further reposition students in a deeper level of classroom participation reflecting dialogue, consultation, negotiation and decision-making. Such a position for the student in the pedagogical relationship with their teacher allows for the engagement of marginalised and silenced students and challenges the positioning of power and authority within that relationship (Rudduck, 2007; Rudduck and Flutter, 2004b). The analysis of data from the case-study schools in this research explored the affordances and constraints of that repositioning of student voice in the classroom and the patterns and issues that emerged.

A pedagogical script in the Irish classroom

Children, as students in the context of schools, education and pedagogy in Ireland have been viewed traditionally as passive and in need of protection. This view arises from the strong influence of Catholicism on education and society as enacted by and through teachers and teaching in primary school classrooms (O’Sullivan, 2005). Children were viewed as vulnerable and to be protected in their moral development, a discourse that permeated schools and classrooms through the patronage of schools by the Catholic Church in Ireland. In the period before 1971, curricular and pedagogic emphasis was placed on the revival of the Irish language, didactic teaching, punishment, and an absence of any regard for the individual needs of the child (Walsh, 2004). Significant changes in curriculum in both primary and post-primary education in Ireland since the introduction of free secondary education in 1967 have shaped a pedagogical script that takes cognisance of the students’ experience of pedagogy in Irish classrooms.

The primary script

From the perspective of pedagogy and learning, the ‘new’ Primary School Curriculum (Government of Ireland, 1971) was child-centred, marking a distinct pedagogical shift from a didactic teacher-centred position that pre-dated the foundation of the state. Curriculum documentation noted the changes in emphasis as identifying a shift from:

Education [which] was ‘curriculum-centred’ rather than ‘child-centred’, and [where] the teacher’s function in many cases, was that of a medium through whom knowledge was merely transferred to his pupils

(DES, 1971:15, referenced by Walsh, 2004).

The 1971 curriculum emphasised the development of the child. Subjects were to be integrated and to be combined with flexibility to meet the needs and interests of the individual child. Pedagogy and teacher positioning was expected to change to accommodate child-centred activity and discovery methods, moving from teacher-directed to a student-centred pedagogy where children were to be positioned as active within positive and interactive classroom relationships. O’Sullivan (2005), however notes resistance from teachers to reposition their practice due to concerns relating to students’ basic skills of literacy and numeracy and the perceived erosion of the teacher’s control of students’ learning. Resistance from teachers towards the child-centred emphasis of the curriculum was seen as a ‘residual influence of cultural definitions of children’ (*ibid.*, p. 441).

A further revision of the primary school curriculum, introduced in 1999, built upon the child-centred principles of the 1971 document that emphasised the full development of the child, individuality, pedagogy based on activity, discovery, and the environment. In this case also, this current active curriculum for primary schools in Ireland, outlined a set of learning principles that centred on the agency of the child in learning, on creating a sense of curiosity and wonder, and building on existing knowledge and experience ‘using guided activity and discovery methods’ (DES, 1999, p. 9). The learning principles also stressed skills, collaborative learning, higher-order thinking and problem solving (*ibid.*). While broadening the social constructivist base of curricular ideology, the document identified the importance of the role of the teacher.

The quality of teaching more than anything else that determines the success of the child’s learning and development in school
(*ibid.*, p. 20).

The teacher’s role was exemplified as ‘caring facilitator and guide’ to provide ‘effective learning experiences’ (*ibid.*, p. 20). The necessity for planning to implement a range of teaching strategies based on students’ needs and on collaborative learning, as well as whole-class teaching, was emphasised. In all of the above, the teacher’s pedagogical relationship with students was significantly stressed, as was the teacher’s identity as a professional.

The teacher will bring a rich, imaginative and innovative range of strategies and resources to the learning process...it is important, therefore, that the teacher is committed to a process of continuing professional reflection, development and renewal
(*ibid.*, p. 21).

Curriculum ideology at primary level has therefore significantly adjusted and reinforced its theoretical base towards a child-centred, social constructivist view of curriculum, pedagogy and student learning. Consequently, the students’ positioning within the curriculum rhetoric has moved from passive and vulnerable to active and agentive in learning with related pedagogical expectations outlined, such as meaning making and knowledge construction.

Reviews of the implementation of the curriculum have identified slow but gradual change in pedagogy and classroom organisation in the nine years following curriculum implementation (Inspectorate, 2005; NCCA, 2005c, 2008b). Issues, relating to child-centeredness and students active engagement have emerged, as whole-class teaching is still observed to be the dominant pedagogical experience for students. These reviews recommended ...

A renewed focus on developing the child's higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills...greater consideration should be given to the use of self-directed learning and to project work...greater direction and guidance should be provided for teachers to enable them to extend their repertoire of teaching approaches and methods to include greater use of collaborative learning including group work and pair work

(NCCA, 2005c, p. 22).

Interestingly, primary school students have identified the subjects they liked most on the basis of their experiences of these subject areas in the classroom citing their preference for subject areas that involved...

Collaborative learning involving decision-making in pairs and groups, active learning using hands-on-methods, inquiry-based learning involving research and ICT, and authentic learning through projects and real-world studies

(*ibid.*, p. 237).

The rhetoric of the primary pedagogical script, its enactment in the classroom and the students' experience of change in pedagogy has demonstrated both the challenge of repositioning the theoretical base of the curriculum and translating these changes into practice for students in the classroom.

The post-primary script

Students in the case-study schools in this research transferred to post-primary schools following what is normally an eight-year experience of classrooms based on these principles in their primary school. Such a curricular and pedagogical script does not exist at post-primary school level in Ireland. Curriculum at post-primary level is subject-specific. Each subject area traditionally had a programme of study outlined for lower and upper-secondary education. Subject syllabi were differentiated at two levels, as higher level and ordinary level, with a foundation level provided for Mathematics and Irish. While the overall post-primary curriculum developed as piece-meal subject syllabi over time, the establishment of the Curriculum and Examinations Board (CEB) in 1984 followed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) that was established by statute in 1998, worked to bring overall coherence to curriculum ideology at post-primary level. Following the revision of subjects under a newly established Junior Certificate at lower secondary level in 1989, the NCCA began a rolling process of syllabus reform at senior cycle based on the

specific requirements and demands of individual subjects. An overall alignment of the curriculum under a skills and competencies framework became the unifying force for the thirty-three subject syllabi that existed at senior cycle.

The ideology of the post-primary curriculum in Irish schools has been traditionally viewed as vague and based on the concept of the provision of general education that was largely unspecified. Specific definitions of subject content have dominated. However, later discussion and revision, in advance of the implementation of a new Junior Certificate programme in 1989, concentrated on the outline of ‘*areas of experience*’ to which students should be exposed (CEB, 1986, p. 3). These were provided without criteria or specification as to how students would experience these in practice within the post-primary curriculum. Prior to the Junior Certificate curriculum reform in 1989, the absence of clear objectives as to how experiences were to be realised in pedagogy was a concern (Mulcahy and O’Sullivan, 1989). This focus on educational experiences as opposed to the outline of curriculum content reflects the later development of the key skills framework for senior cycle (NCCA, 2009b) and the related unifying principles, key skills and statements of learning of the revised Framework for Junior Cycle (DES, 2012a). It was noteworthy also that concerns for the passivity of students also continued to permeate the discourse surrounding how curriculum impacts on the students’ experience.

Given the passivity on the part of students associated with the existing curriculum, is there not a strong likelihood that the curriculum will remain largely an area of passive experience unless clear indications are given as to how objectives...are to be provided for in the curriculum...What is needed is a conceptualisation of the curriculum in such a way that it explicitly incorporates provision for the kinds of learning which are being sought

(Mulcahy and O’Sullivan, 1989, p. 85).

Concerns for the impact of the examination as ‘the distorting role of certification in Irish education’ (*ibid.*, p. 87) had particularly targeted the Leaving Certificate in that it promoted a pedagogy of transmission driven by assessment, certification and ‘the coverage of content, which leads to such certification at the expense of worthwhile schooling’ (*ibid.*, p. 87).

Following the introduction of the Junior Certificate in 1989 to replace the Intermediate Certificate and revisions of senior cycle subject syllabi, the argument continued. Gleeson (2004) argued that the current post-primary curriculum has a narrow technical perspective and is ‘packaged as subjects that contain unquestionable truths’ (*ibid.*, p. 109). Curriculum therefore has continued to promote pedagogy as the transmission of instrumental knowledge as product with little attention to process (*ibid.*). A practical interest in curriculum development and ideology (Grundy, 1987), based on meaning making and interpretation, or an emancipatory emphasis towards the liberation of students through the learning process, have been almost invisible. This emphasis on the curriculum

as product has characterised Irish post-primary education with centralised control of the curriculum to be delivered by the teacher, the dominance of a subject and content orientation, and ‘a strong emphasis on the external measurement of the product’ evident (*ibid.*, p. 110) – the high-stakes Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate examinations.

The senior-cycle script as planned

The key skills framework (NCCA, 2009b), designed to underpin both the individual subject syllabi and the overall curriculum ideology for upper-secondary level, attempted to give overall coherence to the curriculum as experienced by students. Five skills were identified as information processing, being personally effective, communicating, critical and creative thinking and working with others (*ibid.*). The aligning of individual subject syllabi around a unifying key skills framework also reflected attention to the engagement of students and widening of the learning experience to include preparation towards developing active and economically productive citizens rather than just narrow subject-specific competencies that are assessed through subject-specific examinations.

By embedding the key skills in the curriculum, learners are presented with a range of learning experiences and outcomes that improve their present and future access to learning, their social interaction, their information and communication abilities and their experience to work collaboratively

(*ibid.*, p. 21).

The rhetoric for the enactment of these changes focused on pedagogy and the role of the teachers. Pedagogy emphasising student-centred approaches was highlighted with an enhanced ‘role for the teacher as they are less involved in ‘delivering’ learning and more directly involved in facilitating learners and learning’ (*ibid.*, p. 25).

The teacher’s position was also exemplified as a role to empower learners and to develop self-direction in learning. A more unified script between primary and post-primary curricula therefore emerged. More fundamental changes at senior cycle have been planned (NCCA, 2005a) but to date await implementation.

Junior cycle coherence

A similar revision of the junior-cycle curriculum began with the publication of a revised framework for junior cycle in 2012. The revision identified eight unifying principles to capture the junior cycle educational experience for students as focusing on quality, well being, choice and flexibility, creativity and innovation, engagement and participation, inclusive education, continuity and development, and learning to learn (DES, 2012a). Twenty-four statements of learning accompanied these with a further six key skills that were also required ‘for successful learning by

students across the curriculum and for learning beyond school' (*ibid.*, p. 9).

The key skills framework was designed to provide coherence in the curricular framework as experienced by students from early-childhood education through primary to the completion of their post-primary education. This script however, provided no overall context for how these changes to a subject-based curriculum would be enacted through pedagogy as experienced in the classroom by students.

Apart from the motivation of coherence, curriculum overload and the dominance of assessment were further motivators for change at junior cycle. The effect of a high stakes external examination on student motivation, self-esteem and on pedagogy was evident in research tracing students' experience throughout their post-primary experience but particularly approaching Junior Certificate (Smyth, 2006, 2007, 2009).

It is evident that the presence of the Junior Certificate exam influences the nature of teaching and learning, especially in third year, with the focus narrowing to one of preparation for the exam...the use of different forms of assessment might have the potential to change the focus of teaching and learning to one which better facilitates student engagement

(Smyth, 2009, p. 5).

Thus, the proposed revised framework capped the number of subjects to be taken to examination level for Junior Certificate at eight, which would be assessed through a combination externally set and school-based examinations, and continuous school-based assessment. The phasing out of the high stakes external examination is planned from 2016.

An evolving script

It is evident that the curricular discourse that underpins the students' experience at second level has been evolving. These changes, begun at primary level, mark a growing emphasis on curriculum ideology as process, pedagogy as student-centred, and learning as broadly within the social constructivist theoretical frame. While a somewhat deterministic and instrumentalist learning outcomes approach permeates all curricular documents, the dominance of high-stakes external assessment at lower-secondary level has been diminished through the implementation of the aforementioned revised framework for junior cycle (DES, 2012a). The policy discourse has attempted to reposition the student to the centre as active agent in knowledge construction and meaning making as the teacher is moved from a traditional didactic position of transmission, to facilitator and mediator, attending to the individual needs of the student. It is therefore envisaged that the students' experience would, in the future, no longer be assessment driven.

Using a wider lens, these shifting emphases fall within a paradigm shift in Irish education from a theocentric to a mercantile orientation (O’Sullivan, 2005). A discourse of criticism of the over academic focus of the subject specific nature of post-primary education gave way to the introduction of new pedagogies and programmes such as the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme throughout the nineteen-nineties. These represented an increased vocational text in curriculum at macro level defined by specified learning outcomes and aimed at addressing the needs of the economy and economic development. A growing market text was also noted, exemplified by the increasing emphasis on education as a service that conceptualised teachers as service providers in a market place of tradable qualifications (*ibid.*), and a points system for entry to third level based on the achievement of grades in the Leaving Certificate examination. To O’Sullivan (2005), post-primary education had become increasingly instrumental and technical in its motivation coupled with the increased value placed on quantifiable outcomes in a discourse that linked education with economic planning.

A coherent pedagogical script?

The rhetoric of policy documents and the introduction and pre-amble to curricular initiatives have signalled fundamental changes to the post-primary curriculum but failed to provide a coherent framework for pedagogy to partner these changes in curriculum ideology. Teachers have had to rely on ‘teacher guidelines’ that accompanied the revised syllabus documents as the only written discourse to guide pedagogy. Subject-specific in-service professional development programmes were also provided to support and guide teachers in implementing the revised syllabi mainly in the period leading up to the first external examination.

Nevertheless, an overall pedagogical coherence in curricular change at second level has not been evident. The key reference points of the syllabus documents and teacher guidelines for subject syllabi mainly provided subject-based direction for teachers particularly relating to the teaching of specific content areas. The only commonalities and coherence relating to pedagogy broadly concerned the active engagement of students, variety in teaching approaches and the repositioning of the teachers role within a student-centred approach. Analysis of a selection of syllabus and guideline documents illustrates these common features.

Guidelines for junior cycle English (1989) provided broad direction to the teacher.

Fundamentally, the teacher must try to speak less and listen more. The role of the teacher changes from being the source of answers, information and meaning to that of facilitator and motivator of student learning. The students are engaged in actively making meaning rather than accepting received

meaning from the teacher. The teacher's role then is to create the context, give the purpose and direction of the activity and be available to guide, speculate, question and suggest

(DES, 1989a, p. 24).

A further revision of this syllabus for English, published in 2008, was equally broad in its emphasis on pedagogy and placed a particular focus on the individual needs of students as the:

Syllabus provides opportunities for students to learn in ways that most directly meet their needs, interests, and learning styles...as a result a wide range of teaching and learning activities is appropriate

(NCCA, 2008a, p. 5).

These 'ways' and the 'wide range of teaching and learning activities' were not outlined or specified in the documentation.

CSPE guidelines (NCCA, 2005b) framed pedagogy around active-learning strategies and provided a list of appropriate strategies for teachers including structured discussion, simulation games and role play, debate, issue tracking, surveying and working with texts. Revision of junior cycle Science (NCCA, 2006b) made direct reference to the inclusion of learning outcomes for students but was vague on teaching strategies beyond stating that...

Teaching strategies should...include investigative work as well as experimental work...Active learning experiences can lead to a better understanding, while at the same time developing skills and attitudes

(*ibid.*, p. 6).

At senior cycle, a similar discourse on pedagogy emerged from syllabus documents and teacher guidelines. Geography was revised and the changes implemented in classrooms from 2004. The teacher guidelines focused on active learning as the main pedagogical emphasis. Broad statements regarding placing 'students at the centre of the learning' were not exemplified beyond reference to skills, relevance and co-operative learning. The focus was still on teaching specific content.

Active learning methodologies provide a platform through which skills are developed and learning is supported...It places students at the centre of the learning process through ensuring that the content is relevant to their own lives and is engaging for them...It acknowledges that students learn from each other and teachers learn from students, as well as vice versa. It builds skills of problem solving, critical thinking and co-operation

(NCCA, 2004, p. 55).

Significant revision to the mathematics syllabi from 2010, re-named as 'Project Maths' focused on problem solving skills and applications but the discussion on teaching and learning in the curriculum documents was also broad and general. Statements on pedagogical changes referred to 'variety of activities' and 'varied teaching strategies' while the syllabus stressed students' agency in goal setting, action planning and responding to feedback from teachers.

The variety of activities that learners engage in enables them to take charge of their own learning by setting goals, developing action plans and receiving and responding to assessment feedback. As well as varied teaching strategies, varied assessment strategies will provide information that can be used as feedback for teachers so that teaching and learning activities can be modified in ways which best suit individual learners

(DES, 2012b, p.12).

While light on the prescription of even a broad pedagogical framework, Project Maths did anticipate a ‘Bridging Framework’ to link the students’ experience of Mathematics in primary school with that in junior cycle at post-primary level.

Research relating to the impact of the Project Maths syllabus change was carried out by the NCCA during implementation. This research challenged the broad and aspirational rhetoric of the syllabus script and provided an insight into the experiences and changes in pedagogy that teachers introduced and their perception of the change in their role.

For many teachers there has been a change in their role, teaching practices and methods as they have moved away from teacher-led and didactic approaches to more student-centered and active methodologies. Many teachers now see themselves as facilitators of learning rather than givers of knowledge

(NCCA, 2012, p. 20).

However, the teachers identified the challenges of co-operative learning and ‘not all teachers are convinced that these teaching practices offer additional learning benefits over the “chalk and talk” and “drill and practice” approaches that they have relied on in the past’ (*ibid.*, p. 20).

It is evident from the above that the ongoing revision of subject syllabi, curriculum documents and teacher guidelines since the establishment of the CEB in 1984 and the NCCA, as a statutory body in 1998, have not provided an overall coherent framework for pedagogy that contains and embraces the emphases across the subject-based curriculum at post-primary level. Initially, teachers were provided with subject specific and content-specific teaching support through in-service programmes of professional development. However, as revisions became embedded in-service support reduced. Newly qualified teachers or those who did not receive professional in-service support have therefore relied on written syllabus and guideline documents, their school culture of pedagogical planning, collaborative support from colleague teachers and their own professional identity to guide pedagogical practice and their students’ experience of that practice.

In overview, the identifiable commonalities that constitute a discourse of pedagogy at second level during this period now concern active learning, a focus on the needs of the individual, attention to skills, pedagogy and learning based on the achievement of learning outcomes, and the use of a varied range of teaching methodologies. These common themes have not been articulated as a

unified pedagogical framework or script. Unlike the primary curriculum, no clear theoretical position on knowledge, curriculum or pedagogy had been articulated for teachers, students or parents as the vague and undeveloped pedagogical script reflected in policy documents has never been fully developed or shaped into a coherent framework. The current junior cycle framework for reform (DES, 2012a) could provide that shape and coherence at junior cycle, but, within the subject-specific nature of senior cycle, no such broad framework to guide pedagogy and the students experience of the curriculum has been provided to date beyond the key skills framework published by NCCA (2009b).

Enter the inspectorate

In the absence of a common coherent framework on pedagogy arising from curriculum and policy documents, inspectorate reports, evaluating the quality of teaching and learning in schools and classrooms, have provided another voice in this discourse. The evaluative and reporting role of the Inspectorate is outlined in the Education Act (1998) to ‘evaluate...the quality and effectiveness of the education provided in those schools or centres, including the quality of teaching and effectiveness of individual teachers... and to report thereon to the Minister’ (*ibid.*,13:3).

Inspectorate reports, first published in 2006, whether thematic, subject or whole school, have added to the discourse on teaching and learning in schools by identifying good practice and making recommendations for improvement. However, as with the curriculum discourse, a definitive evaluation framework for the Inspectorate to identify good pedagogical practice and a theoretical framework to support such a good practice discourse is not published as a unified policy document. School self-evaluation guidelines (Inspectorate, 2012a) provided, for the first time, a generic evaluative framework for pedagogy to facilitate the school and teacher to self-evaluate practice whereas inspection reports for individual schools provided a context-based evaluation arising from observation, dialogue, and evaluation of the practice observed. These reports have added another voice in shaping the pedagogical script for the drama that is enacted in Irish classrooms.

Inspectorate reports on the case-study schools

Individual subject inspection reports and a whole-school evaluation report provided an external evaluative view of pedagogy in the three case-study schools. Analysis of subject inspection reports for St Anthony’s College produced a positive evaluation of participation by students in classrooms, the use of a range of active-learning strategies including visual stimuli, and engagement with co-operative strategies that in one lesson was described as excellent. Questioning strategies were also evaluated positively, as was the use of investigation in some classes. Recommendations in these reports focused on increased use of differentiated strategies in mixed-ability class groups and the identification of learning outcomes in lessons.

In Castlecourt, a whole-school evaluation report praised the identification of specific learning outcomes by teachers in lessons. The integration of information and communications technology (ICT) and the use of a range of stimulus materials to engage students also received a very positive evaluation as did the achievement of a balance between whole-class teaching and individual attention to students. Recommendations were made to improve the depth of questioning and the wider use of assessment for learning that focused on the sharing of a learning intention, questioning strategies and peer assessment.

Interestingly, a subject inspection in Mathematics highlighted and recommended a reduction in the level of direct teaching and the need to engage students actively in problem solving and the use of a wider range of teaching and learning strategies.

A whole-school evaluation report on Bradfield College was very positive in relation to the provision of learning outcomes to students and the integration of ICT into teaching. Inspectors commented on the balance between teacher inputs and the level of activity and engagement by students. One of the main recommendations in the report focused on key learning points and student note taking, and suggested greater emphasis on visual stimuli and notes composed by the students rather than dictated by the teacher.

While the numbers of published reports on each of the case-study schools is quite small, a commonality of theme regarding what was viewed as good practice emerged for teachers reading these reports. This largely reflected that of the syllabus and curriculum documents in that reports praised the specification of learning outcomes, active engagement of students, variety in teaching strategies, individual attention for students and the integration of ICT. Recommendations pointed to areas of poor practice that included a predominance of teacher inputs that reflected a teacher-centred approach, the poor quality and lack of depth of questioning, and the need to limit note taking.

Composite reports

Published composite inspection reports have merged the findings of a large number of subject inspections reports to provide a more generic evaluation and guidance on teaching and learning in particular subjects. These reports have provided a further addition to the pedagogical script for all post-primary schools.

A composite of English subject inspection reports: 'Looking at English' (Inspectorate, 2006) identified active strategies that engaged students as the key positive feature of English lessons. Particular concerns were expressed in relation to the dominance of the voice of the teacher and its impact on student engagement in lessons.

The dominance of teacher talk, whether providing information and opinion or questioning students, was a strikingly consistent finding in inspections of English... It must be said that too often the unvarying use of this teaching style led to passivity and disengagement on the part of students

(ibid., p. 31).

The need to vary the style of questioning and increase the use of differentiated teaching strategies were among the other main weaknesses identified by inspectors in relation to pedagogy in this report.

Quite a similar message emerged from ‘Looking at Geography’ (Inspectorate, 2007). The composite message from geography subject inspection reports focused on very positive aspects of pedagogy relating to active engagement of students, applying geographical skills and the use of visual stimuli to engage students in the specific learning intention of the lessons. Concerns again centred on the dominance of the teachers’ voice in lessons as ‘some less effective lessons were dominated by teacher talk and an over-reliance on the textbook...the students were passive and not challenged to respond to questions, tasks, or the application of geographical skills’ (*ibid.*, p. 23). Issues relating to the depth and quality of questioning, tasks for students and the level of differentiation were also raised in the report.

A composite of Science subject inspections reports: ‘Looking at Junior-Cycle Science’ (Inspectorate, 2008) identified good practice as active engagement, practical work, individual attention, and an investigative approach to scientific enquiry. A similar pattern of concerns emerged relating to the limited range of teaching strategies and the need for improved questioning strategies since ‘in general, the inspectors recommended that greater use be made of questions directed to individual students, as this would reduce the amount of chorus answering, help focus students’ attention, and maintain a high level of engagement and enthusiasm’ (*ibid.*, p. 25). The impact of the dominance of teacher inputs on the passivity of students was again highlighted.

While not articulated as a clear framework for pedagogy, the consistency of message from both context-based and composite inspection reports gives insights into practice in Irish post-primary classrooms which broadly reflects that of the curriculum and syllabus documents, and the subject-specific guidelines. Therefore, inspectorate reports, as a further source of the pedagogical script for second level classroom, have identified the need for active engagement of students, individual attention and co-operative learning whereas the dominance of ‘teacher talk’, teacher questioning and the absence of the identification of the learning intention are highlighted as areas for concern. Although these reports did not point to pedagogy as dialogue or co-construction, they did identify and affirm practice that was student centred.

A teacher deciphering the pedagogical script from curriculum documents, teacher guidelines and inspectorate reports would identify a drama focusing on pedagogy as active engagement of the student through a range of teaching strategies and learning experiences based on a clear and specified learning intention. The script would point to good lessons, as being student-centred rather than being dominated, directed or controlled overtly by the teacher where the individual needs of the student should be addressed in the context of the needs of the whole class. A theoretical framing of pedagogy as social constructivist emerges as the key theme of the drama that encourages active participation by students and discourages passivity created by the dominance and control of the teacher.

Examinations: the villain of the piece

The impact of the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate examinations on the students' experience in schools has been a concern in Irish education for many years (Mulcahy, 1981) but crystalised significantly through the findings of the Commission on the Points System (1999). The impact that the Leaving Certificate had on pedagogy and the students' experience in sixth-year classrooms was particularly highlighted especially regarding the impact of the points system on subject choice and on the narrowing of personal development experiences for students in senior cycle.

A narrowing of the curriculum arising from the tendency to teach to the examination rather than to the aims of the curriculum; and an undue focus on the attainment of examination results

(Hyland, 1999, 4:4).

The commission supported the development of a terminal examination that assessed a wider range of skills and competencies and signalled support for the future development of the 'key skills framework' by the NCCA in 2009, to avoid the narrow focus of the examination as simply providing a competitive access route to third-level education.

The Leaving Certificate should begin to recognise a wider range of skills, intelligences and achievements than is currently the case...it should also recognise the ability to work co-operatively and a variety of other aspects of social and personal development, which the NCCA refers to as 'the qualities of the student as a human being

(*ibid.*, 4:4).

The key pedagogical impact of the pressure to achieve points was identified as teachers' focused primarily on direct didactic teaching to prepare students to meet the demands of the examination. Hyland (2011, p. 6) identified the 'backwash' effect of the Leaving Certificate examination on classroom practice, on 'what is studied and how'. She argued that the issue lies with the examination rather than with the curriculum since subject syllabi demanded that students' critically

engage with the subject and that they demonstrate the capacity to engage in higher-order thinking skills (*ibid.*). Analysis of marking schemes for the examination indicated the potential for students to achieve middle grades based on the recall and basic understanding of syllabus content, while it was felt that the achievement of higher grades would demand the demonstration of higher-order skills. Students' experiences of the examination differed however, as 'many students have indicated that intense preparation and examination practice enables them to obtain high grades by learning off by heart evaluations or analyses prepared by others, and regurgitating these at the examination' (*ibid.*, p. 13).

Students' and teachers' comments on their experience of the examination and its impact on pedagogy also supported these arguments. Indeed, comments from teachers on Project Maths demonstrated their concerns and the residual impact of the examination on classroom practice as 'many teachers feel under pressure to revert to old style 'drill and practice' teaching and abandon student-centered, inquiry-based methodologies...some teachers have reported that they have reverted to 'chalk and talk' teaching methods under these time pressures in sixth year' (NCCA, 2012, p. 14).

A longitudinal study of student experiences in post-primary school, commissioned by the NCCA and carried out by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) in 2004, also identified the growing impact of the examination, initially at Junior Certificate but more particularly so at Leaving Certificate level. The voices of students in a study completed by the NCCA in 2007 presented a contrast as second-year students, particularly those from advantaged backgrounds were very clear on their view of good teaching stating that 'they learned best when teachers explained things clearly, had a clear grasp of their subject, made learning fun and encouraged students to express their opinion in class as distinct from teaching from the book' (NCCA, 2007, p. 12).

However, on transfer into third year, these students noted a change in their experience of pedagogy brought about by the proximity of the Junior Certificate examination.

'For most students, third year was characterised by an increase in schoolwork and homework. Students reported that they experienced greater pressure as increasing demands were being made on them to complete their courses and to revise first and second year work'

(ibid., p. 13).

Students experienced some variation in learning experiences in the different programmes chosen for senior cycle. Students in Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) identified more 'frequent use of active learning methods, including project and group work, an approach which helps to re-engage some students who were previously disaffected with school' (Smyth and Calvert, 2011, p. 17).

When students reached sixth-year in the Leaving Certificate the examination-focused experience of Junior Certificate had developed into teacher-led and teacher-centred pedagogy emphasising coaching and practice for examination performance at Leaving Certificate.

Classes tend to be characterised by teachers doing most of the talking, by teachers reading from the book, by practising previous exam papers and being given homework'

(*ibid.*, p. 224).

The influence of 'grind schools' also emerged as students, taking extra tuition privately, criticised some teachers' wider pedagogical approaches. These students expressed significantly different views on their classroom experience than those expressed when these students were in second year:

Many middle-class and high-aspiring students expressed impatience with, and were critical of, teachers who did not focus on 'what would come up in the exam'. For them, good teaching constituted practising exam papers and focusing precisely on the kinds of knowledge and skills needed to do well in the exam. In this context, an emphasis on broader educational development or on life skills was seen as irrelevant. Indeed, some students negatively contrasted teaching at school with the more narrowly focused approach to exam preparation characteristic of private tuition ('grinds')

(*ibid.*, p. 225).

Arguably, the change in attitude to their experience of pedagogy and their relationship with their teacher was as a direct influence of the pressure of the Leaving Certificate examination and its impact on their progression to third level reflecting the 'backwash' effect (Hyland, 2011).

Dramatis Personae

The players in this dramatic discourse are the students and teachers against the backdrops of curriculum, examination and pedagogy. The plot emerges as curriculum and examination inform pedagogy as enacted and experienced in the context of individual classrooms by students and teachers. The curriculum for post-primary schools while representing increased continuity from the primary curriculum is subject-specific and lacks a unified pedagogical framework. Common elements can be deciphered through the key skills framework, the syllabi and teacher guidelines and through inspection reports that combine to highlight a social constructivist view of pedagogy and learning to be enacted through active engagement and participation of students and through a range of teaching strategies that are student-centred rather than over dominated by teacher-direction. The script attempts to reposition the teacher from traditional didactic delivery to largely passive students, to one of facilitation and scaffolding of students' learning through active pedagogy and co-construction.

However, the presence of two high-stakes external examinations has been identified as significantly impacting on the students' experience in the classroom. They have the effect of subverting curriculum ideology towards one of product or content, and reduce pedagogy to content transmission and didactic delivery. The aim, arguably, is the pursuit of examination grades by students and teachers for progression from junior to senior cycle or for transfer to third-level.

The tension between a curriculum ideology that broadly reflects learning and pedagogy as social constructivist involving students and teachers in co-construction and dialogue, and an examination-directed pedagogy that points towards transmission and curriculum as content, is central to interpreting the situated contexts of the classroom cultures in the case-study schools. The placing of student voice within these situated contexts will provide further insight into these emerging and evolving dramas.

The student council script

As outlined in Chapter Four, both the Education Act (1998) and the National Children's Strategy (2000) focused the Irish response to the requirements of the UNCRC (1992), article 12, through the encouragement and facilitation of the formation of student councils. Although a council was and is not currently a requirement for schools, it was a combination of the publication of a guidelines document, a support service that provided advice and training for teachers and students, and the embedding of external whole-school evaluation that provided an impetus to the widespread establishment of such councils in schools since 2002.

As described, the three major research projects on student councils in Irish schools point to the potential of the council construct to enable students to engage in democratic practices (O' Gorman, 1998) but the actual experience of students was quite negative. The pace of change, issues of communication and the control by teachers were cited by students as significant issues (McLoughlin, 2004). Keogh and Whyte's study on fourteen student councils revealed the contrasting positive perspectives of the school management on the role of the council with the students' somewhat negative experiences of engagement (Keogh and Whyte, 2005).

The student council and curriculum

Links between CSPE as the curriculum for a taught citizenship programme at junior cycle and the student council in the Irish education system are weak and underdeveloped. The CSPE syllabus outlines a key aim of the subject as one 'to prepare students for active participatory citizenship' (DES, 1995, p. 2).

While the syllabus pre-dates the Education Act (1998), the student council construct is not mentioned in the syllabus document. Guidelines to support the teaching of CSPE (NCCA, 2005b) make brief mention of the council in relation to the action project assessment module suggesting the study of democracy through the organisation of a student council election. While not evident in written policy, the clear motivation to attempt to link a citizenship curriculum agenda with the operation of a student council came from the enactment of the National Children's Strategy (2000) and the subsequent development of extensive support materials for schools to create a meaningful link between the student council as a democratic construct and the curriculum for CSPE (OMCYA, 2007). Reflecting the curriculum script in relation to the post-primary curriculum in general, the council is identified as having the potential to provide powerful 'opportunities for students to appreciate concepts of democracy and law...and yet the coherence is not there' (Jeffers and O'Connor, 2008, p. 8). The absence of coherence refers to the subject specific nature of the Irish post-primary curriculum and the lack of any significant cross-curricular developments in democracy and citizenship (*ibid.*). The council is viewed as largely external to the curriculum while representing 'a valuable exercise in of democracy' (O'Gorman, 1998, p. 186).

Student voice in Irish education policy: a conclusion

In Irish education policy discourse there is no statutory direction to schools to activate student voice for the purposes of consultation, dialogue, or co-construction with students in relation to their education. What has emerged, encouraged by both the Education Act (1998) and the National Children's Strategy (2000), is the establishment of student councils, in post-primary schools only, as a rights-based motivation in response to the requirements of ratification of the UNCRC (1992).

The Education Act (1998) established the student council construct within the power and governance of a school's board of management. Guidelines, while signalling student councils as 'a voice for students' (DES, 2002), outlined the extent and limitation of that voice in post-primary schools. The growing engagement with students in school inspection has raised the profile of the voice of the student and that of the student council in providing an insight into the operation of schools to inform external evaluation. However, this is reflective of a low-level student voice mainly as a quantitative data-source that is some distance from a consultative and dialogic engagement. In contrast, the growing engagement with the voices of students in a range of other educational initiatives, and the insertion of Article 42A, 4.2 into the Irish Constitution in 2012 (Referendum Commission, 2012) relating to the rights of children and the legal requirement to hear the views of the child in judicial proceedings, it is argued, signals an advancing rights-based agenda for student voice in Ireland.

These developments relating to student voice in Ireland, it is argued, represent both change and progress in the twenty years since Ireland's ratification of the UNCRC (1992). The establishment of the student council in post-primary schools represents an aspiration towards the democratisation of schools. Furthermore, advocates for student voice and the student council as a construct for student voice also point to the council as a valuable learning engagement for students in developing the skills required for democratic participation and active citizenship in adult life.

Research in Ireland however indicates that the work of student councils is often characterised as tokenistic, elitist and unrepresentative of the wider student cohort, and that council activities and engagements do not reflect action, agency or the potential transformation of school culture. The aspiration for the construct as moving students towards 'having a say' as well as 'having a voice' (Democracy Commission, 2005) will be explored in the case-study student councils below.

Existing levels of engagement must be viewed through the lens of typologies of student voice (Fielding 2001b). The four-level typology extends from viewing students as data sources, to engagement in transformative dialogue between students, teachers and school management (Fielding 2004a). Students act as a data source at the most basic level of this student voice typology, but are situated through voice and engagement as active respondents, co-researchers with teachers, and as researchers in their own right, at the most advanced level. Within this typology, it is argued that student voice, as currently situated in Irish policy discourse and practice, positions students as data-sources at the most basic level.

It is equally argued that this level of student voice does not challenge existing power hierarchies and maintains a positioning of students as silenced and subjugated in a school environment where the curriculum is largely non-negotiable and student outcomes are driven by high stakes external examinations. While a school improvement agenda, that is externally imposed through inspection, is using student voice as a data source to inform the performance of the school, it remains to be seen whether school self-evaluation will become a catalyst for a wider emancipatory and transformative student voice or whether it will limit and focus student voice to an acoustic of external control.

As the prologue ends the curtain lifts for Act I...

Act I: The students' voices

Introduction

ACT ONE OPENS with the voices of the students. The drama unfolded from the pedagogical script. The stage was cluttered. Curriculum, examinations, expectations, routines, and authority took their places on the stage as the backdrop to the unfolding drama of pedagogy and classroom experience. The students spoke first and in the opening scenes they spoke of relationships in their classrooms. They then spoke of their normal experience, how they were taught, how they learn and how they interact with their teachers in the context of different subjects and as they progress from junior cycle to senior cycle towards their Leaving Certificate. As the act progresses the students described a new voice, a student voice, a voice of dialogue and consultation in their classroom. They made comments and suggested changes to their teachers. The students' reactions to the changes they experienced close act one.

Relationships

Respect, given and received, between student and teacher and between peers, was a central theme of the students' commentary on their classroom experiences. Respect came intertwined with care and with a classroom atmosphere that was informed by positivity and enjoyment, and an expectation that students' behaviour would be managed, reflecting findings across research engaging with the voices of students in Irish schools relating to their experiences in classrooms (Devine, 2002; Lynch and Lodge, 2002; Smyth, Banks and Calvert, 2011). Students in just one fifth-year class group in St Anthony's College exhibited signs of disengagement and poor behaviour in their descriptions of their experience in class. Strategies introduced by their English teacher in providing choices and variety in classroom activities and homework attempted to address this.

Students expressed desire for mutual respect, care and a positive atmosphere in all the case study classrooms. Simple direct statements from a second-year geography student and a sixth-year mathematics student outlined the basic expectation and experience for students.

I like geography because our teacher is very kind
(2nd year JCSP student, Castlecourt College).

A teacher who treats you with respect
(6th year student, Bradfield College).

Variations in these attitudes and expectations for respect and care, positivity, and discipline were not evident as students of all ages described similar experiences and expectations. Gender was not significant but age was a variable in relation to attitudes towards misbehaviour. Younger students in general were more concerned with poor behaviour by their fellow students and the effect of ‘messing’ on their own work in the classroom.

Students interrupting the teacher ...and messing

(1st year student, Bradfield College).

People are messing and getting distracted by what people are doing

(1st year student, Bradfield College).

Other young students stressed the expectation that their teacher would manage students’ behaviour so as to create a secure and safe classroom within which they interact with their peers.

Not being mean, because when people aren’t mean and mocking you, you can learn a lot better

(2nd year student, Castlecourt College).

Get other students that are interrupting the lesson to be quiet so the rest of us can hear what is going on

(2nd year student, Castlecourt College).

Senior students also expected their teacher to manage classroom behaviour to allow all to participate.

Teacher should be stricter in class... time is wasted in class giving out to pupils - this means the whole class suffers

(5th year student, St Anthony’s College).

Messers in class are so annoying

(5th year student, Castlecourt College).

Senior cycle students were also forthright in their expectations of respect rather than the management of behaviour. The need to earn the respect of students was a recurring element of the students’ discussion relating to their teacher.

When teacher does not respect us, treats us like children...if they don’t respect me why should I respect them

(TY student, Bradfield College).

A fifth-year student from Castlecourt College expressed similar sentiments in relation to respect, but also indicated a reaction and negative response towards a perception of being disrespected as...‘do nothing for them’...‘make it hard for them’.

Student: *Ah well, you know, if you have a history with a teacher you’re just going to go in and do nothing for them, you’d go out of your way to make it hard for them*

Interviewer: *Ok*

Student: *Whereas if you have a bit of respect for the teacher and they respect you, you would work away for them grand*

Interviewer: *That's very interesting*

Student: *You've got to give respect to get respect*

(5th year student, Castlecourt College).

Both narratives from senior cycle students in different schools presented an expectation that the respect of students was earned by teachers through treating the students with respect as young adults and through control of poor and distracting behaviours in other students. These achievements were seen by the students to create the positive atmosphere in the classroom that allowed them to engage and participate.

A small number of senior students linked a positive atmosphere and respect with their willingness to participate without embarrassment or intimidation from their peers...

Overall there is a good atmosphere and students are able to ask questions without being embarrassed

(TY student, St Anthony's College).

You are not afraid to talk up in the class like...in some classes students might be intimidated by other students whereas when you're not like you can talk and give your opinion

(5th year student, Castlecourt College).

While the younger students identified the importance of the disposition of the teacher in the context of personal relationships and classroom management, the older senior cycle students identified with the overall classroom as a social environment. They saw issues of interaction, enjoyment and co-operation as the central and important elements of their classroom experience and clearly linked this to their progress in learning.

Having a good vibe in the class helps you to enjoy the lesson more and makes learning more enjoyable

(TY student, St Anthony's College).

Discussing subjects and topics, lighthearted approach, good atmosphere, notes very good, asking questions, teacher always does their best to answer them and never dismisses them

(5th year student, Bradfield College).

A good atmosphere, working together, getting on well with the teacher, explanations on hard topics

(5th year student, Castlecourt College).

The students' descriptions also linked positive relationships and atmosphere in their classroom with their view of effective pedagogy. Even in second year, the students linked their view of a good teacher with atmosphere, management of workload, and control of homework and tests.

*The teacher is good and so is the atmosphere, we don't get lots of homework,
just enough that it won't stress you out, we get study plans for big tests*
(2nd year student, St Anthony's College).

The teacher was described in terms of respectful authority, making pedagogical decisions and responding to the needs of the student. The teacher provided 'study plans', as a means of mediating the curriculum towards 'big tests'.

*If I don't understand a certain point the teacher will explain it more. When I
take down notes that have everything I need to know then it makes it much
faster and easier to learn*
(2nd year student, Castlecourt College).

Older sixth-year students, while identifying the teacher as expert, were respectful but more critical of the teachers' position. The teacher's role was viewed from an instrumentalist or rationalist perspective 'clear and concise instruction'. Teaching was identified and valued in the context of the teacher's 'credible reputation' based within this frame. A judgement was made 'you will want to try harder' based on an acceptance and belief in the teacher's authority to direct pedagogy towards examinations.

*Clear and concise instruction, clear and well thought out notes, a teacher you
respect and want to do for. A teacher with a credible reputation - if you do well
initially then you will want to try harder... work that is challenging but not to
the extent that you can't do it*
(6th year student, Bradfield College).

Power and control

The students' comments on their classroom experience indicated their awareness of the authority and control of their teacher. Respect emerged strongly in classroom interaction but the students' comments indicated how respect was bounded within a structure of control in the classroom reflecting Foucault's discourse of truths and the expression of power and authority that centred on the teacher and defined relationships and expectations. Students were aware of the rules and seemed to feel secure within these boundaries.

*The class is relaxed and easy going but we still have respect for the teacher
and his rules are followed*
(TY student, St Anthony's College).

Interactions, while respectful, were characterised by a power and authority differential between student and teacher. This student was permitted by their teacher to engage with their partner in a topic in the lesson.

I am allowed to work together with my partner
(2nd year student, St Anthony's College).

The simple comment seemed to summarise the underlying authority of the teacher to direct activity in the classroom as combining both a social and pedagogical environment. Commenting in general about the authority of their teachers to direct classroom practice, students spoke negatively of feeling subjugated by the teacher's direct authority in relation to activity that did not engage them.

The teacher just says to take down that, and there would be no discussion in it
(2nd year student, Castlecourt College).

They equally disliked criticism and anger aimed at the collective rather than the individual...

Teachers who give out a lot – not treating us like adults because some people are messing
(TY student, Bradfield College).

The comment of a sixth-year student was indicative of the embedded nature of teachers' power and authority.

If the teacher is nice and can relate to the class more, instead of scaring or threatening to give punishment work
(6th year student, Bradfield College).

Senior cycle students were particularly concerned to be treated as adults and sought fairness in classroom management with the expectation that individuals rather than the collective would be targeted. Students wished to be:

Treated responsibly and not tarred with the same brush because of a few messing
(TY student, Bradfield College).

Senior students were further aware of the impact of negative relationships in their classroom interaction and expected their teacher to manage the classroom with fairness rather than negativity.

Constant giving out breeds animosity and negativity
(TY student, Bradfield College).

All students expressed clear and forthright expectations of their classroom experience. They both expected and valued Foucault's normalised classroom discourse that centred on the authority of the teacher but was based on established practices reflecting trust, respect and positive behaviour. Younger students were concerned that the teacher would manage poor behaviour, while older students expected to be treated with respect. At an interpersonal level they expected respect from their teacher but also expected their teacher to earn their respect. They were aware of and accepted the authority of their teacher to manage the classroom and to impose rules but they also expected their teacher to challenge individuals who displayed poor or disruptive behaviour.

Students' voices in many research settings expressed similar concerns and expectations for respect and trust (Cook-Sather, 2002; Lynch and Lodge, 2002; Mitra, 2004; Rudduck, Brown and Hendy,

2006; Smyth, 2007; Wilson and Corbett, 2007). The social environment of the classroom as a related concern for students in these schools also emerged in a range of student voice research and discussion (Arnot, McIntyre, Pedder and Reay, 2004; Fine, Torre, Burns and Payne, 2007; Wilson and Corbett, 2007).

These studies reflect the voices of students in St Anthony's, Bradfield and Castlecourt, in that a positive and respectful social environment within which they could both interact and learn is valued. Many students in the case-study schools described a classroom of enjoyment and engagement but some of the older students expressed a desire for a classroom atmosphere that allowed them to participate without fear, intimidation or feeling embarrassed. In these circumstances, these students connected a positive social classroom environment with effective pedagogy. The teacher was viewed with respectful authority in maintaining the social environment, making pedagogical decisions and responding to the needs of the student.

Pedagogy as experienced

Through the narratives of their reflections, questionnaires and interviews, students described classroom activities that were teacher-directed but that included a variety of student-centred activities. There was no significant variation in the students' descriptions between schools, but there were evident differences in practice between students' narratives relating to different subjects. The commonalities of the classroom experiences as described by students across all subjects, included clarity relating to the aims of the lesson and teacher-led discussions that were normally followed by student tasks, group work and homework. Throughout the students' commentary, in the majority of classrooms, notes written on the board, notes dictated by the teacher, or notes in prepared hand-out form were described as routine experiences. Direct teacher explanation, notes as a distillation of the key learning points and the teacher's voice were the key instruments described in what can be interpreted as a largely teacher-centred pedagogy.

Of the eight subject areas that the students experienced during the research, those that had a skills-based and practical focus including Science, TY Sport Science, Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) and Geography were described by students as combining direct inputs through teacher explanation and discussion, visual stimuli often projected on screen using a data-projector, and some degree of co-operative learning as group or pair work. Homework followed in most subjects. The students' pedagogical experience of English, although text based, centred on the dramatisation of these texts in the classroom.

Pedagogy in History, Mathematics and Economics was described by students as more teacher-directed, within which the students were largely passive in the context of engagement and participation.

In describing their experience of Science, TY Sport Science, CSPE and Geography the students spoke of a range of student activities with strong teacher direction. TY Sport Science students described teacher-directed pedagogy as discussion and notes combined with projected visual resources.

What the lesson is going to be about is made clear at the start. We are asked to relate the topic to our own experiences...work on the projector being shown to the class, taking notes on important topics

(TY Sport Science student, St Anthony's College).

Second-year Science students similarly described their normal experience of pedagogy as a combination of practical activities and cooperative activities with significant direction from the teacher:

Taking down notes and doing experiments, teacher explaining what we are doing, group work

(2nd year Science student, St Anthony's College).

Using the board, being in groups, diagrams to show what is what, teacher is patient, everything is explained to us

(2nd year Science student St Anthony's College).

Each description in these subject areas pointed to some teacher direction and control. In these lessons the teacher explained and provided notes. These routine experiences were then combined with aspects of group work, experiments, discussion and cooperative learning. In general, pedagogy in Science, TY Sport Science, CSPE and Geography seemed positioned mid-way on a continuum between traditional didactic and constructivist pedagogy where some discovery and co-construction of knowledge and understanding was facilitated and scaffolded by their teachers.

In contrast, the students' experience of History, Mathematics and Economics presented a more traditional and teacher-directed approach. These subjects represented five class groups, four of which were taught in Bradfield College. One of the mathematics class groups was from Castlecourt. First-year history students from Bradfield described an almost totally teacher-directed pedagogy that positioned them as passive in their engagements in the classroom. One student described their experience as...

We summarise the chapter at the end, he asks us questions that he makes up to help us to learn more, take points coming up to a test so that we know what we learn...tells us what we did wrong in our questions for homework

(1st year History student, Bradfield College).

Sixth-year economics students in Bradfield described a similar experience of pedagogy that was teacher-directed and controlled, again, creating largely passive students who were nonetheless engaged in some discussion and responding to oral questions to assess understanding. Again, one of the sixth-year students describes their experience:

He makes it clear what we are going to learn, we have a relaxed discussion talking about the lesson in everyday terms. We have notes broken down to the main points. A lot of questions are asked that help to clarify difficulties
(6th year Economics student, Bradfield College).

Pedagogy in both class groups as described by students, was didactic and teacher-directed with a strong focus on assessment and examination. As will become apparent, both teachers in Bradfield were challenged by the voices of their students to consider their practice.

English presented an interesting contrast. Students from St Anthony's College described a classroom practice that engaged students in dramatising English texts as a central element of pedagogy. The second-year students were very positive towards this experience while fifth-year students, working with the same teacher, were more challenging and disengaged in relation to this practice. The second-year students described their experience as combining learning and enjoyment.

A fun and interesting visual way of learning
I find it harder to sit down, stare at a poem and memorise the words, I find it easier to act it out and remember, it is so much fun as well
(2nd year English students, St Anthony's College).

The voices of the fifth-year English students described a classroom of challenging behaviour and partial disengagement wherein their teacher used note taking as a method of control. One fifth-year student identified the need for notes to limit 'messaging' or 'zoning out' but was also aware that the boredom of notes could result in a similar reaction.

You do need some notes...people start messing in the plays, if you do it too much they tend to start messing and they get hyper sometimes

Not to ramble on about the same point, just gets boring and I zone out... not too much writing... it goes in one ear and out the other.
(5th year English students, St Anthony's College).

The students also identified the tedium of note taking and their strategy to limit engagement and to 'get it over and done with'.

If you are taking down notes off the board, people start to lose interest and they get tired and bored, if the teacher asks do you understand, everyone just says 'yes' because they don't want to drag on the class, they just want to get it over and done with
(5th year English student, St Anthony's College).

These students, whose comments focus on negative experiences made clear strategic decisions not to ask questions to facilitate their disengagement.

A tale of two subjects

Teachers in two of the three case-study schools taught Mathematics. Finbarr taught sixth-year mathematics and economics in Bradfield College while Ita taught second-year mathematics and fifth-year geography in Castlecourt. In these different school contexts, the students described very similar experiences of Mathematics. Students of Geography in Castlecourt College provided a strikingly different description of their experience of pedagogy in Geography to that of the Mathematics students.

Mathematics

Students' description of their experience of Mathematics reflected a pedagogy that was didactic and was informed by the repetition of mathematics problems and solutions linking classwork to homework and directly to examination questions. In both schools, the students described their largely passive role as receivers of the transmitted knowledge of the teacher. However, they were responsive to the promptings of the teacher in attempting and correcting mathematics problems. Leaving Certificate students in Bradfield followed the setting out of the problem on the 'board' by Finbarr. The teacher then presented the steps to the solution and that the students followed.

We work through the topic and examples slowly building on what we have learned from previous examples. I find it useful to have examples written on the board. If I don't understand, I can pinpoint a line that I don't understand, and the teacher can explain it in more detail

Doing it step by step on the board to use as a template, then practise using the book until it's second nature

(6th year Mathematics students, Bradfield College).

Second-year students in Castlecourt described a similar experience in their experience of Ita's mathematics classroom but identified her particular emphasis on homework that was examined and checked in each lesson. Homework for Ita acted as a monitor for students' learning in second year, while in sixth year in Bradfield, the students followed the teacher's lead and practised until 'it's second nature'. The second-year students in Castlecourt described following Ita as she was 'showing' and explaining 'on the board'.

Teacher explains clearly how to do problems...we take notes on some examples that would apply to our homework

Examples being done on the board, then showing how homework was done on the board

Homework is given which is explained very well in most cases. I attempt the questions at home. The following day each question is fully laid out and explained on the board. It clarifies where I have gone wrong

(2nd year Mathematics students, Castlecourt College).

Having followed, transcribed, and practised using Ita's problem solving method, the students then took notes.

The teacher writes notes on the white board, which we have to write down. If we don't understand anything the teacher will go over it. We write corrections in red so we can link back on it

(2nd year Mathematics student, Castlecourt College).

The practice of note taking, described by students as embedded in most subjects, reflected a further strategy in teacher-directed pedagogy. The students' description of their experience of Mathematics in both schools reflected the 'chalk and talk' and 'drill and practice' identified in the pilot phase of Project Maths (NCCA, 2012) as will be evident below. Ita's second-year students significantly challenged her approach when they commented in the dialogic consultation, while the sixth-year students sought a continuation of Finbarr's approach with no changes in pedagogy as the Leaving Certificate examination approached. Their reactions reflect the findings of research into Mathematics and the effects of the Leaving Certificate examination on pedagogy (Hyland, 2011; NCCA, 2012; Smyth, 2011).

Geography

In contrast to their narrative relating to their everyday experience of Mathematics, second-year, third-year and fifth-year geography students described a student-centred, stimulus-driven pedagogy with almost no reference to note taking. While lessons were directed and controlled by the teacher, the pedagogical script was one that reflected learner-centred experiences and active engagement and participation by students with a variety of stimuli and resources. Students from second year, third year and fifth year presented a concordant voice in their narratives. Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) students, whose attendance and retention in school was supported by this programme, were very clear and insightful about their experience. One student's comment had already identified the kindness of their teacher but others were very clear on their experience in geography class.

My teacher is explaining everything clearly; we are listening to other students and learning from them. We are learning to do sheet work by watching videos

(2nd year JCSP Geography student, Castlecourt College).

These young students also described their teacher's use of a mind map to gather the key points and words from the students. This practice sat in direct contrast to note taking. Mind mapping the main points and the focus on key words reflected JCSP support strategies designed to develop students' literacy and to encourage the formulation of sentences and paragraphs arising from the key words (NCCA, 2010).

Another second-year class group described routine group work and independent learning in Geography.

We go into groups but some have different opinions so we have to look in the book and do some investigation, that's what I like
(2nd year Geography student, Castlecourt College).

Although the spectre of examinations became evident in the narrative of third-year students, their awareness of their teacher's facilitation of independent learning and equally, their awareness of the impact of this strategy on their learning, pointed to a student-centred classroom of knowledge creation and co-construction where the teacher facilitated these activities and scaffolded the students' learning.

Doing it yourself you learn way more rather than when she is telling you, when you find out yourself you learn way more
(3rd year Geography student, Castlecourt College).

Well, we cover one topic at a time in great detail so that it makes it easier to learn the stuff. We do activities so it sticks in your brain. We do tests on every topic at the end
(3rd year Geography student, Castlecourt College).

Fifth-year geography students described a similar and varied classroom experience of activity, engagement and participation, with a range of student-centred strategies to support their learning without reference to note taking. Following a long list of activities, 'questions from the teacher' featured last on the list of activities as set out by this student.

We look at videos and slide shows on the computer, we make stuff with play dough, using the local area as examples, spider charts, bullet points and diagrams, class discussions, researching on the Internet, questions from the teacher
(5th year Geography student, Castlecourt College).

The students' descriptions of contrasting experiences represent the extremes in pedagogy, as articulated by the students in the case-study schools, as their normal and routine experience in the classroom. These experiences represent a continuum of practice from didactic, teacher directed transmission on one extreme to a student-centred, social constructivist framing of pedagogy on the other reflecting Alexander (2008). On this continuum students are positioned in pedagogy on a scale from passive receiver to active participant while the teacher is positioned on the same scale as

director and controller to facilitator, scaffolder and coach. These experiences vary between subjects and students' age in the context of examinations. The backwash effect (Hyland, 2011) of examinations and the views and expectations of students in Leaving Certificate classes (NCCA, 2012; Smyth, Banks and Calvert, 2011) are reflected in these students' voices

Notes - an examination-driven pedagogy

The provision of notes by the teacher, whether dictated or transcribed, reflects a reductive pedagogy of transmission. Note taking centred primarily in students' accounts of their experiences in History, Mathematics and Economics; all subjects included in the research from Bradfield College. English students in St Anthony's College presented a mixed commentary on their experience of notes while students of Science and CSPE, also in St Anthony's, and geography students in Castlecourt made limited comment on their experience of note taking in their classrooms. Note taking became particularly prevalent in classes approaching examinations in the third year of junior cycle and in sixth year at senior cycle. The practice reflects the impact of the examination on pedagogy and on the subject matter presented (Hyland, 2011). Examination questions seemed to replace the experience of the wider curriculum as teachers narrowed their focus to the demands of the examination (NCCA, 2012; Smyth, Banks and Calvert, 2011). Interestingly, the students directly linked note taking to preparation for examinations and tests. The demand for, and the privileging of notes can be viewed as reflective of Foucault's power knowledge discourse. This places the surveillance of the examination as centre stage reflecting both the power of the examination to direct pedagogy and the normalising of this teaching methodology within students' expectations. It further confirms and supports the teacher's authoritative position within the power knowledge discourse of the classroom.

Note taking emerged significantly in the students' descriptions of their classroom experiences for all year groups in Bradfield College and were not solely confined to those preparing for examinations. First-year history students in Bradfield had already described summarising chapters of the textbook and taking notes from the teacher. These students described the limitations of note taking on their experience of History

Well I think writing loads of stuff up on the board is just mind-boggling really

We have no pictures of what we are learning

(1st year History students, Bradfield College).

Note taking was also present in the commentary of TY history students in Bradfield. Both the first-year and the TY class groups reacted negatively.

When I am taking down notes I do not learn them, I just write them down as fast as I can

(TY History student, Bradfield College).

Fifth-year economics students and sixth-year mathematics students in Bradfield described similar practice. However, in contrast to the first-year and TY history students, these older students were very positive in relation to this experience.

He covers the notes and explains to us by giving everyday examples, talks to us about what is happening in the news. It is easier to understand. We get little tests - quizzes - to make sure we know and understand what we have been learning

(5th year Economics student, Bradfield College).

We are using the notes that the teacher made for us by cutting down the information from the book. This is a lot better as the textbook is very complex

(6th year Mathematics student, Bradfield College).

Practising the questions in class and at home...repeating procedures over and over again helps let everything sink in. Going through notes in order to understand them

(6th year Mathematics student, Bradfield College).

The students' reaction to note taking in first year and in TY contrasts significantly with the comments of the fifth year students, but most particularly with the commentary of the sixth-year mathematics students. While the fifth-year students experience some interaction and discussion with Finbarr, their teacher, his reaction in sixth year mathematics, as described by the students, was one of teacher directed transmission involving 'cutting down' information, 'practising', 'repeating' and 'going through notes'.

Students in Castlecourt also described their experience of note taking in Ita's second-year mathematics class. The link between notes, homework and the examination was clear even in second year for most students. They described their experience as:

The teacher explains everything, gives us notes on the board, gives us examples...teacher answers our questions and tells us exactly what to study for the test

Writing notes in the copy and doing the homework from the previous night on the board

(2nd year Mathematics students, Castlecourt College).

Contestation about the place of notes emerged from the students' commentary in English in St Anthony's College. Ultan, their English teacher, did not provide notes as an aspect of his practice with the second-years although he did use notes in his attempts to manage the engagement of his fifth-year English class. Focusing on pedagogy that was diametrically opposite to the provision of notes, Ultan concentrated on dramatising English texts with his second-year class to assist students' understanding and interpretation. Ultan's students voiced a conflict between their

enjoyment of a classroom of engagement, activity and participation, and a demand for notes as an imperative for examination success.

I think it's all fine to be acting out and stuff but when it comes to the exam I feel more comfortable when I have notes in front of me to be able to learn the poem or whatever, even a novel. It's easier to learn stuff for the exam...I prefer to get notes off the board

(2nd year English student, St Anthony's College).

The tedium of note taking and the limited engagement involved compared to acting and the dramatic representation of poetry and drama was a counter argument by some students.

When you are just writing you don't remember it, you just write it down

I like learning orally rather than a lot of writing because I don't find myself paying attention to what I am writing when I take down notes, but I find talking and listening very helpful

If you are taking down notes off the board, people start to lose interest and they get tired and bored

(2nd year English students, St Anthony's College).

These mixed views pointed to the embedded nature of note taking in pedagogy and, 'when it comes to the exam', the effect of examinations and how this is translated into expectations, even in students as young as second year in junior cycle. Within the classroom field, notes were perceived by students as providing the cultural capital with which they could address and compete in the context of the demands of the examination. This, in turn, created an expectation that the teacher would provide this capital within the classroom as a field of practice (Bourdieu, 1977). Approximately one third of the second-year English class group expressed this view. The practice of note giving and note taking was not presented in the initial narratives of students in Geography, Science and CSPE. Subsequently however, the students' consultative commentary identified a desire, among the majority for note taking to be an element of classroom practice in these subject areas, a point not highlighted in their descriptions everyday classroom experience.

Dialogic consultation - the students had their say

The students in all the eighteen class groups that engaged in this research were afforded the opportunity to engage in a dialogic consultative process with their teachers. At the outset, this involved a discussion in the classroom and the completion of a questionnaire by each student that was gathered and examined by the teacher. A second questionnaire and reflection sheet were then provided to students on completion of the series of lessons that followed the consultation. This process facilitated students to have a say in their experience of pedagogy and relationships in the classroom, and to suggest changes to their teacher. The teacher then examined and mediated the students' comments and made the changes that they thought appropriate and possible within their

organisation, management and responsibility to the class group. It emerged however that these decisions were bounded yet again by the presence of curriculum, examination and expectation.

While students have a right to have a say in their classroom under any interpretation of article 12 of the UNCRC (1992), such a right is not afforded to students in Irish schools beyond the provision to establish a student council. In these classrooms teachers facilitated student voice as a privilege. They willingly engaged with this research but were also open to professional reflection and development that might emerge from the process. The students reacted very positively to the dialogic consultation with their teacher. When interviewed some weeks after the dialogic consultation, many students had only vague memories of the process that took place in that one class period. Students who had a clear recollection spoke of teachers' openness and willingness to engage with their commentary.

We had a say and we could tell the teacher how we liked to learn
(2nd year student, St Anthony's College).

*She took in what we suggested and mixes other stuff with the way we suggested
and it has been unbelievably easy to understand and to learn*
(3rd year student, Castlecourt College).

One particular student, who had a clear recollection of the dialogic consultation, highlighted the change from the normal pedagogic interaction with their teacher and his/her own apprehension and fears for their positive relationship with their teacher.

We had a discussion and the teacher asked us 'is the way I am teaching you ok'? 'Are you not learning stuff'? 'Are you learning'? 'Do you want to change something or not do it'...I found it weird when [the teacher] was asking the questions because I thought [the teacher] was in trouble or something, or was teaching us wrong, I was confused, but as the weeks went on it explained itself
(2nd year student Castlecourt College).

In their discussion of the process some students identified a change in the authority centre of the teacher as they recognised the presence of student voice and teacher voice in the classroom during and following the consultation. These students recognised the change towards discussion and a further enhancement of existing positive relationships.

*There was one voice and that was the teacher's. Well we could ask questions,
Yea! But now it's much more about discussion*
(TY student, St Anthony's College).

*It shows us that he cares when we are being asked about doing it, while some
teachers are like just it's 'my way', that's the way it is, you don't have a say,
those classes you are more tense because it's not very easy to learn*
(2nd year student, Castlecourt College).

The aforementioned disengaged fifth-year English students from St Anthony's College had a different experience of the dialogic consultation process, and simply identified their involvement as moving from silence to talk and being afforded an opinion. The few comments from the students who could recall the process pointed to students being prompted and encouraged to discuss their experiences.

If you had your own opinion you could say it

At least we had to talk... at least he had given us our opinion

(5th year students, St Anthony's College).

The experiences of student voice for these students points towards consultation as a positive experience with a recognised contribution to improved relationships and respect. These findings reflect a wide range of student voice research in the UK, USA and Canada and Australia. The commonalities in the experience focused on students' capacity to engage in consultation and dialogue, the positive effects on respect and trust and the impact on the inclusion of marginalised and silenced voices (Arnot, McIntyre, Pedder and Reay, 2004; Mitra, 2001, 2004, 2007; Nieto, 1994; Rudduck, 2007; Rudduck and Flutter, 2004b, SooHoo, 1993). The process also points towards the agenda and the impact of increased personalisation, prefigurative democracy and active citizenship when students take or are afforded a more active role in decision-making relating to their own learning, classroom practice or in issues relating to the wider school (Fielding, 2011; Klein, 2003; Rudduck, 2003). Rose and Shevlin (2010), working in Ireland, identified the development of very positive feelings of belonging and self-esteem through engagement with the voices of marginalised students to encourage empowerment, making choices and responsibility.

Student voice

The voices of the students were revealed through discussion with their teacher or as written on completed questionnaires and reflection sheets. Further exploration and discussion of the process and issues was achieved through interview with a focus group of students from each class group. Analysis of these voices showed that students in all subjects with the exception of sixth-year mathematics and fifth-year economics, wanted more exposure to active pedagogies that they described as responding to visual stimuli, engaging in group and pair work, and working on individual and group projects. Similarly, and as a consequence, they sought less passive note taking. Mathematics students facing their Leaving Certificate and Economics students in fifth year, both taught by Finbarr in Bradfield College, expressed no issues in relation to note taking but voiced a clear wish that their experience of pedagogy would remain the same. A more conflicted discourse emerged from some second and third-year students. Many voices sought active and engaging pedagogy as outlined, but an examinations discourse revealed voices seeking notes or the

continuation of the provision of notes from their teacher. This was evident in the voices of students from all junior cycle class groups but particularly from those in second year and third year.

In general however, voices from the dialogic consultation in most subjects presented a similar message to teachers. More opportunities for active engagement and less passive note taking echoed across the commentary of the students, their subjects and their schools.

I find it hard to learn when we just take down information from the board
(1st year History, Bradfield College).

I would like more practical work like experiments but the lessons are mostly enjoyable
(2nd year Science, St Anthony's College).

I would like if we did more activities and group work rather than reading from the book and the teacher telling us
(3rd year Geography, Castlecourt College).

Less note taking, more videos on topics they we're studying, more practical work in the gym, group discussions and visits from guest speakers and coaches
(TY Sport Science, St Anthony's College).

More visuals and audios to make the class interesting and easier to learn the subject, also it helps the atmosphere in the class making it more enjoyable for classmates and teachers
(TY History, Bradfield College).

However, while note taking had been identified as established practice in classrooms, the students' commentary in the dialogic consultation was not universally directed towards change and echoed the 'cacophony of competing voices' (Reay, 2006, p. 179) both within class groups and between different subjects. Students of second year CSPE, English and Geography who had not highlighted note taking in their descriptions of their normal classroom experience were both forthright and conflicted in their comments on the practice.

CSPE students were divided almost equally in their views. Many students echoed the commentary of other class groups requesting...

More movies and less notes...going out on tours...less writing...more open discussion and group work
(2nd year CSPE, St Anthony's College).

Other students, both boys and girls, in the same class groups voiced insecurity in their commentary in relation to learning but the issue of examination eventually emerged through references to revision even though these students were in their second year.

Spend more time on a topic, like learning one thing in one class so then we can make sure that we know it

If we had to take notes every now and again to have something to revise

More notes, more groups, more activity, DVDs

That we could learn from the book so when it comes to the exam you will know what to study

Revise the notes we take down in classes and make more notes for homework

(2nd year CSPE students, St Anthony's College).

Second-year English students in St Anthony's expressed a similar complex commentary reflecting their positive experiences of acting and dramatising texts and their growing insecurity in a minority of students, in this case, that learning through activity and participation would not be translated into examination success.

I leave the class understanding everything and am able to go back on what we did, but still notes would help in the long term

It is easier to remember and to think of rather than just taking notes down. It is also more fun and memorable

I prefer getting notes from the board because I just learn it easier that way instead of doing drama and drawing

I would prefer more notes, that is what I would change

(2nd year English students, St Anthony's College).

One student describing the consultation discussion in the second-year English class noted that:

Most people said that they would enjoy more activities but there were a few people who said oh no! Keep doing the notes coming up to the summer test

(2nd year English students, St Anthony's College).

Fifth-year English students, who had demonstrated disengagement, suggested a balance between classroom activities like note taking and listening to their teacher. The students were honest and direct in their commentary on each of these aspects of pedagogy.

A mixture of different things like taking down notes, which can be boring, we also do more active things such as watching a movie of the play rather than just reading

The more active things...bring me out of my sleepy frame of mind. A well-balanced mix between the boring sit down and writing method and the interactive method

A little less talking and a little more writing, work sheets and hand-outs to keep things explained a lot better

(5th year English students, St Anthony's College).

These students could see the impact of the various strategies on their disengagement but were confused in their suggestions between 'notes which can be boring' and more active experiences that wake them from a... 'sleepy frame of mind'.

The students' commentary relating to everyday classroom experiences in second-year geography in Castlecourt had spoken of interactive and cooperative activities but did not mention routine note taking. Once given the opportunity to comment in the consultation process a request for a notes copy emerged in the commentary of a number of female students in the class motivated by a concern for tests and examination. They requested short notes at the end of the class, to be transcribed into a notes copy to replace 'sheets' that the teacher prepared and distributed in a booklet form.

A notes copy would be better than sheets

A notes copy so people can revise for a test

To write more notes in the copy, talk at the end of the class about what we have done

(2nd year Geography students, Castlecourt College).

Therefore commentary of students of CSPE, English and Geography reflected a conflict and some contradiction in narrative between pedagogy as experienced and as desired by students. Arguably, these students, as they advanced through second year towards third year and Junior Certificate, were requesting a further distillation of the curriculum to satisfy their perception of the demands of examination performance. The script as interpreted by many of these students pointed away from the broadly social constructivist pedagogy, albeit with significant teacher direction. Instead, their commentary looked towards a narrowing experience of examination-focused pedagogy symbolised by the growing demand for notes from some students again reflecting the findings and observations of Hyland, (2011); NCCA, (2007), Smyth, Banks and Calvert (2011), and Smyth (2009).

Gender emerged as a variable in just two instances in the consultation processes. The girls had significant comments to make on note taking in the aforementioned second-year geography class in Castlecourt and in one TY sports science class group in St Anthony's. In all other commentary there was no significant pattern emerging in the context of gender.

All six girls in the geography class of twenty-nine students requested a notes copy while none of the boys made this suggestion. The boys in the class requested continued active experiences and visual stimuli. In TY Sport Science, the students' negative reaction to notes was almost universal in the absence of external curriculum and examination. The boys' comments typically focused on reducing notes... 'less note taking, more videos' or 'less notes to write and more practical classes'. Of the ten girls in the class of twenty-nine students, six echoed the dominant voice:

Sometimes we don't watch videos and just take notes. It is very hard to learn things when you just take notes

(Female TY Sport Science, St Anthony's College).

The remaining four girls had a more nuanced view and requested a reduction in note 'taking'. They placed the emphasis on note 'making' where students, using their own words, write short notes on the key points. These girls still wanted to receive distilled knowledge, albeit not as dictated or transcribed notes, providing evidence, potentially, of a backwash effect from their Junior Cycle examinations-focused experience.

I think we should do a little less notes as this is not an exam subject, all we need is a few key points, not everything to do with the topic

When we watch videos I remember them better and when we take notes in our own words then I learn

I would reduce the notes to short, to-the-point notes

(Female TY Sport Science students, St Anthony's College).

All the girls in this class group were the most vocal in their annoyance directed at the boys for their lack of order during discussions and debates.

Students are messing, most of the time it is grand but at times there are a few people who won't just be quiet, I find this irritating at times

People talking over other people and some don't get to speak

(Female TY Sport Science students, St Anthony's College).

Students, through the dialogic consultation, also voiced a number of other issues that concerned classroom experiences. A small group of second-year geography students highlighted the effect of the timing of a class period in the afternoon following a double-class period of PE and their feelings relating to how they engaged with Geography at that time.

Last class in the evening we are tired after PE

It is the last class on some days and I am tired and the room is very stuffy most of the time

I would change that the class is normally in the evening [after lunch] because it is an important subject and everyone is wrecked

(3rd year Geography students, Castlecourt College).

A small number of fifth-year geography students requested a break during a double class period, while two students requested an end to a learning and assessment method used by their teacher that required them to remain standing at the opening of the lesson until they could answer an oral question relating to homework from their teacher.

Have more group work and a five-minute break when we have a double class

That we wouldn't have to stand up and answer questions

Answering questions while standing up - before you sit down could be intimidating to some people

(5th Year Geography students, Castlecourt College).

Some of the first-year students in Bradfield College commented on the amount of homework they received and requested some formative feedback on their work.

Only give homework that is essential

I think when correcting homework I would leave a comment

(1st year History students, Bradfield College).

A small number of second-year science students in St Anthony's considered the importance of the make up of groups in collaborative learning activities and requested that students in groups could 'switch around'.

Maybe switch around groups when doing quizzes so people can get to know others in the class

(2nd year Science student, St Anthony's College).

These students used their voice to articulate individualised and contextualised concerns relating to their experiences of pedagogy. The affordance of student voice as dialogic consultation allowed them to articulate these issues to their teacher with confidence and trust to achieve change. Commentary on issues concerning procedures, activity and timing were examined and largely addressed by the teacher.

The issue of note taking in lessons, as presented by student voice, however demanded a more complex analysis by teachers. The growing demand for notes, as revealed by the consultation, symbolised the growing influence of the examination bounded by the pressure of time to complete the curriculum. This arguably also reflects the aforementioned Foucauldian view of the power and surveillance of the normalising practice of examination on classroom experiences for students in these schools. Teachers, as will be revealed in Act II, were challenged by students' requests in relation to note taking particularly in second year and in TY. The students' commentary identified their backwash (notes) into practice in some second-year classes and their rippling forward into TY that demonstrated their growing power in pedagogy as the students advanced towards examination.

A close examination of Mathematics - discordant student voices

The voices of mathematics students in Bradfield and Castlecourt had described pedagogy in line with descriptions provided by NCCA (2012) as 'chalk and talk' and 'drill and practice'. This was interspersed with the provision of copious notes in the case of one of the mathematics teachers. Two contrasting commentaries emerged from the students once they were consulted on these experiences. Sixth-year students in Bradfield described pedagogy as notes and examination preparation about which they were very positive while second-year students in Castlecourt wanted significant change.

Sixth-year mathematics students in Bradfield sought no significant changes in pedagogy following the consultation except a continued emphasis on examination, teacher direction and the

provision of notes. The stress of the demands of the examination emerged from the students' comments. Many students simply commented that they saw no need for change in their classroom. Others sought further individualised challenges, more questions and significantly, a limitation on 'pointless' and 'irrelevant' questions. A sense of the individual focus on the task and challenge of the upcoming examination pervades the students' commentary.

No changes, I am performing very well, I am delighted with the class

More notes or questions or more different examples of questions on each topic

More challenging examples for notes so students must employ more understanding and a variety of problem solving techniques - basics are necessary but more difficult problems are beneficial

Some people ask irrelevant questions which lead to complicated explanations that I don't understand

Less pointless questions that have nothing to do with the problem we are solving

There are a lot of questions being asked which are not necessary or related to the course.

(6th year Mathematics students, Bradfield College).

Student voices in this class pointed to their dependence on teacher-centred, directed and controlled pedagogy. Dependency on the knowledge and power of the teacher to deliver and to transmit in the context of examination success was expressed. Ironically, these Bradfield students actively discouraged student voice in pedagogy in the form of questioning and discussion from their peers as:

Some people ask irrelevant questions

The only questions to be asked should be directly related to the Leaving Cert course

(6th year Mathematics students, Bradfield College).

In complete contrast, younger second-year mathematics students in Castlecourt, who had described a teacher-directed pedagogy, requested significant changes relating to individual attention, explanations, increased student activity, cooperative learning and pace.

When the teacher assigns class work she should then go around to each individual and see if they need help

If the teacher could explain how to do problems a bit better because I am not always clear about what she is doing

More activities; go through questions slower and explain clearer

Do more group work where we could help each other, slow down on some topics

Along with the teacher explaining it, the students should be allowed to help each other

(2nd Year Mathematics students, Castlecourt College).

These comments created a reaction from the teacher as student voices attempted to move pedagogy toward dialogue, interaction and co-construction in Mathematics. Ita, their teacher was somewhat conflicted between her routine practice, the pressure of curriculum and examination and significant requests for change from the students. The challenge to change reflected the vague pedagogical script of curriculum guidelines and the more directive subject inspection reports on Mathematics (DES, 2011b; NCCA, 2012).

A drama of requests

Significantly, the students' comments focused on their direct classroom experiences with their teacher, were neither personalised nor concerned with relationships, but identified a number of patterns. Requests were not dramatic but indicated the students' wish to focus on pedagogy and to move its emphasis in different directions on the continuum of practice oscillating between didactic transmission and a more social constructivist framing. Subject, year group and gender form a backdrop to these requests.

Younger students sought experiences in their classroom that placed them as active and participating, either as individuals or with their peers, reflecting their earlier descriptions of a classroom atmosphere of positive relationships and mutual respect. Their commentary challenged situations that positioned students as passive, particularly in the context of note taking as an element of classroom teaching. As students advanced toward their Junior Certificate a conflict in their views emerged. In second year, in subjects with an established pedagogy of student-centred activity including English and CSPE, some students seemed to lose confidence and asked for teaching strategies with a greater examination focus. The students sought greater provision of notes from their teacher to address their perceived needs in examination preparation. In contrast, the second-year mathematics class from Castlecourt requested a broader range of experience, more student-teacher interaction and a slowing of the pace. Some of the students in one of the three second-year geography class groups requested a small scale notes copy intervention while students in third-year geography sought increased notes in advance of their examination. Note taking had not been mentioned as part of their routine of classroom experience but emerged when students were consulted and facilitated to suggest changes.

Senior cycle students presented a different pattern of commentary. Both TY class groups requested a reduction in note taking, and in Bradfield, increased use of visual stimuli and discussion leading to interaction and active engagement. Fifth-year geography students made no reference to note taking but requested continued and increased interactive student-centred experiences, while

students in fifth-year economics and sixth year mathematics requested no change in their largely teacher controlled classroom experience in Bradfield.

The commonality identified in the students' requests from the case-study schools reflects the findings of a wide range of student voice research that engaged with students' experience of pedagogy. More interesting and engaging classroom activities and less use of the textbook and blackboard was a key request of students reflecting (SooHoo, 1994). Students looked for activities that engaged and motivated them, combined with fairness and equity in teacher questioning (Arnot, McIntyre, Pedder, Reay, 2004). These students also looked for greater use of spider diagrams rather than reading from the textbook and 'discursive note taking' (*ibid.*, p. 13). Classroom experience that reflected variety, participation, choice and challenge were common themes that emerged from the voices of students in a number of further studies (Flutter and Rudduck 2004; Rudduck 2007; Rudduck and Flutter 2004a; Rudduck and Flutter, 2004b).

The pattern or the 'cacophony' of voices that reflected the situated and context based expression of student voice also emerged for students in the case-study schools. The voices emerged from individual relationships and interactions in classrooms and subjects bounded by curriculum and examination. The complexity of students' individual voices and the task for the teacher to respond to those voices, created a challenge. Research on student voice challenges the concept and expectation of a singular and coherent student voice from the chorus of individual voices that form a class group (Arnot and Reay 2007, Fielding and McGregor 2005). Issues relating to inclusive, representative, silenced and marginalised voices populate this space (Bragg, 2001; Breslin, 2011; Cook-Sather, 2002). Attempting to listen to disengaged voices and negative voices, and to respond to their messages is a further challenge (Arnot and Reay, 2007; Cook-Sather, 2006). What emerges is a drama that reflects the complexity of requests against a background pattern of subject, curriculum, examination, student and teacher. The concept of a universal student voice, an authentic and representative student voice or one with a clear and concise message is challenged (Arnot and Reay, 2007; Chadderton, 2011) both in the student voice literature and also in this current research study.

Student voice - actions and reactions

All nine teachers afforded their students a voice in pedagogy through dialogic consultation as discussion in the classroom and through questionnaires. The teachers listened to their students, heard their classroom comments and read their questionnaire responses. They then mediated these comments and implemented changes, which students recognised as significant in some classes. Students also identified improved relationships and respect for and from their teacher arising from

the dialogic process. Such a process is fundamental to student voice. While not afforded to students by right in the Irish context, engaging with student voice reflects fundamental democratic principles (Bragg, 2001), social and educational inclusion (Ranson, 2000), personalised learning (Hargreaves, 2004, Ruddock, 2006), participation (Rudduck and Flutter, 2004b), dialogic pedagogy (Alexander, 2008), democratic conversations (Shultz, 2009) and person-centred education (Fielding 2007, 2011).

The teachers' responses and the students' reactions complete act I of the drama. First year history students in Bradfield had described a pedagogical experience based on note taking, listening to the teacher and homework. Their post consultation commentary expressed very positive views and identified a significant change towards engagement with discussion, visuals, cooperative learning and manageable homework. These young first-year students responded very positively and saw benefits in terms of examinations.

I think there was a kind of better layout to the class after all our discussion, and we had more visual stuff as well

I liked it when we did group work, it made me understand more; the pictures he showed us, and when he drew on the board. We did quiz work and when we played the gladiators game on the Internet. I liked when we went over our homework. The homework wasn't too long or too short. I liked when we said what we were going to do for the class and then reflect after the class on what we had done

Diagrams, DVDs and any visuals gave you an image and it really helped in the exam

(1st year History students, Bradfield College).

Recognition of changes in pedagogy and reaction from the second-year students in Castlecourt and in St Anthony's was similar. The students were positive in recognising increased student activity including discussion, projects, fieldwork and visual stimuli. Students also continued to enjoy these lessons.

We learned in pairs, we asked people next to us to help our revision. After we had done that we had a quiz in teams of four that was really fun. In our teams we also did a presentation on some of the chapters that we learned and one member of the team had to call it out at the top of the class. That was great craic altogether. Then we took some notes and we got some homework on the chapter that we had done that day

(2nd year Science student, St Anthony's College).

We watched more videos and had a more fun way of learning rather than taking notes and doing boring work, I feel if you do things fun you get the students' attention

(2nd year CSPE student, St Anthony's College).

*We went out and walked about and did a project afterwards instead of being in.
We did it our way and our teacher cooperated with us. It was great fun*
(2nd year CSPE student, St Anthony's College).

Notes and the need for notes also featured in the student comments on the changes they experienced – 'then we took some notes'.

The second-year English students had been divided in their views relating to their teacher's wish to dramatise texts and the students' perception of their need for notes that they could revise for examinations. The inclusion of some notes with the continued use of drama seemed to satisfy most students in the class

For a limbo poem we did limbo dancing, you could recite the poem in your mind while doing it...the notes were handy, probably better than drawing, I think notes and acting helped way more
(2nd year English student, St Anthony's College).

We acted out the poem 'Nettles' but I thought it was easier to learn when we got notes on it
(2nd year English student, St Anthony's College).

A similar divided narrative relating to the issue of the notes copy in second-year geography in Castlecourt was resolved by the provision of that copy. While suggested by the girls in the class, its implementation received broad approval and seemed to have established note taking in the class when it did not feature as practice before the consultation.

Well at the end we have 5 minutes towards the end to take down notes on what we have done so we put it into a separate copy so it makes it easier to learn for tests

The notes in the copy and going into groups helped. Talking about the topic also helped'...the notes copy was a good idea and the pictures were a good way to understand the lessons...taking notes down, easier for learning

We were given notes in our copies and it is easy to look back and revise tests. We are also shown pictures and it is easier to understand when you see what you are learning about

(2nd year Geography students, Castlecourt College).

In another geography class, the students also recognised their teacher's attempts to change their experience of the afternoon geography class after their double period of PE.

The last class on the Thursday was tiring and she made it fun
(3rd year Geography student, Castlecourt College).

The contestation relating to note taking in second year seemed to advance following the consultation. CSPE students experienced an increase in project and group work and spoke of their engagement and enjoyment of these activities in the absence of note taking, while in second-year

English and geography, the students' commentary following the consultation seemed to welcome the combination of active pedagogy and the provision of notes for the examination.

A number of third year geography students had requested an increase in the amount of note taking in their class but their teacher largely ignored this comment and continued with the active approaches to teaching geography that the students had originally described as their normal experience in that classroom. Following the consultation, cooperative learning strategies were increased as didactic teacher talk was reduced.

We do more group work and we don't always be sitting down listening to the teacher - we do it ourselves

(3rd year Geography student, Castlecourt College).

These changes helped me because it made the work fun and I paid more attention to what was going on. When the teacher is just telling me what it's about I find my mind starts to wander and I don't really pay attention

(3rd year Geography student, Castlecourt College).

Senior cycle students, including those in TY and fifth-year, also recognised the implementation of the changes that they had suggested and were again confident and positive in their reactions. TY students recognised a significant change in practice while fifth year economics students recognised the continuation of the practice they had affirmed. Sixth-year mathematics students also continued to have a clear focus on their approaching Leaving Certificate examination as the final aspects of the research were completed in the weeks prior to that examination.

TY students in Bradfield described a significant change in their experience of History following the consultation. The students were universally positive in their commentary on the change from what was one student's description of the TY classroom as the 'teacher up front calling out notes' to a classroom where students have 'an active role in the class'.

I found the classes interesting and enjoyable, we were able to learn about topics we would not normally do and we were given an active role in the class...new teaching methods proved both novel and useful throughout

(TY History student, Bradfield College).

TY students in St Anthony's, who were equally vocal for a limitation on note taking and increased engagement with visuals and practical activities, recognised that the teacher had reduced note taking to what the female students requested as more focused notes. The students also recognised the relevance of the new experiences and the value of 'learning in different ways'.

The notes are shorter and more to the point and easier to learn, no unnecessary notes. We are talking about personal experience that makes everything more relevant

We are watching more videos. This is better and I am learning more as we are not just taking notes, we are learning in different ways so we remember more
(TY Sport Science students, St Anthony's College).

Fifth-year English students had described a classroom experience of disengagement and challenge, and routine practice based on note taking, reading from the text and occasional attempts at dramatising and acting based on the particular text. The students' commentary was confused and contradictory between the need for note taking as a focus for key learning points and as an aspect of classroom management. Rather than a process of dialogic consultation, Ultan, their teacher presented students with different approaches to the study of a Shakespearean drama. The students then decided on the method that best suited them. Ultan provided choice rather than voice as dialogic consultation to students. Through this experimental approach the students identified the change in approach to their English class and were positive in their reaction. While not being afforded the opportunity to suggest specific changes they did identify with the positivity of increased choice, discussion and engagement. Note taking continued to remain an aspect of their classroom experience. Following the affordance of these choices, their comments described increased engagement and participation in the classroom.

More group work and being more active in class, it was more interesting and gets you absorbed into the class

We talked about the topic more and took down notes in class...writing down notes and then going through them

We got to speak more really...he would put us into groups and he would ask us what we thought that meant

Like you had your own opinion and stuff, like if you had your own opinion you could say it. You just felt more involved in the class

He would give you different choices of homework and stuff. You got to pick out which one suited you the best

(5th year English students, St Anthony's College).

Ultan's interpretation of student voice as the provision of choices in pedagogy by the teacher seemed to be effective in increasing the inclusion and engagement of these marginalised students.

Mathematics revisited - a tale of two mathematics classes

The experience of mathematics students in two of the schools in both second and fifth year was similar. The students described teacher-directed coaching through demonstration on the board, transcription of notes, step-by-step repetition, and working through and checking completed homework in class.

Sixth-year students in Bradfield were forthright in their wish for no change in this practice except in their request that their experience become even more examination focused with less 'irrelevant

questions'. Although the dialogic consultation and the students' commentary did trigger much reflection by their teacher, the students experience remained, as they requested, largely unchanged. The issue of 'pointless questions' was again raised by a small number of students emphasising the examination focus of the students.

I noticed little difference in how we learned this topic and how we did before

*Too many pointless questions; should be more emphasis on examples and notes
and how to solve them*

(6th year Mathematics students, Bradfield College)

Finbarr, their teacher introduced one change. This emerged from his own reflection and was not suggested by the students. The addition of an overview sheet for each examination topic and question was a further addition to the teacher-directed notes and examination focus within which the students and teacher worked.

*The main difference was getting the sheet at the start, which gave us an
overview of the topic. I found it helpful to be able to see where everything was
ultimately going to head. Also it was handy to have a concise overview of the
topic, which we can refer back to later*

(6th year Mathematics, Bradfield College)

In contrast, the second-year mathematics students in Castlecourt identified issues for the teacher relating to individual attention, pace, the level of student activity and cooperative learning. Following the consultation, the students recognised significant changes including the introduction of group work, a slowing of the pace of the lessons, one-to-one attention and more attention to students' understanding. Students' positive reaction to these fundamental changes in practice, introduced by Ita, was clear from their comments.

*We had group work everyday to help each other and we are not moving as fast.
We are using everyday examples as well*

*She lets us do more group work and explains homework before giving it to us
and is going slower*

*We did group work, she corrected homework one by one, we used everyday
references, and she corrected questions on the board and explained them
slowly if we didn't understand*

(2nd year Mathematics students, Castlecourt College).

Ita responded to student voice, and both accepted and implemented students' suggestions reflecting a movement in this classroom along the continuum from pedagogy of transmission towards more active engagement and participation and a more active voice in pedagogy.

Conclusion

Intermission:

Act I closes. The students' voices in Ita's and Finbarr's classes reflect the simplicity and equally the complexity of student voice. Simplicity, in that, although not previously afforded to them, these students have a right to a voice and a say in a democratic and dialogic classroom and school. Simplicity, in that the students demonstrated their capacity to engage in consultation and to discuss aspects of their experience of pedagogy with their teacher and peers in the context of their classroom relationships. Simplicity also in that engagement with student voice developed and enhanced trust, respect and positive relationships between students and teachers.

The complexity of student voice emerged from the range of voices, relationships, and interacting forces within the drama. Complexity in that the curriculum and examination, reflective of Foucault's power knowledge discourse, exerts a strong force on pedagogy and classroom interaction. This impact increased as the students advanced through junior cycle. Complexity also in that individual teachers' sense of habitus comprised of their identity, authority, role and disposition, shaped classroom interaction, atmosphere and relationships and thus modified and mediated the reaction to and impact of student voice. Complexity in that an authentic, representative and singular student voice does not exist. What emerged from consultation is a myriad of voices, situated, modified and mediated within the complexity of classroom relationships.

Act I of the drama revealed that students could describe and understand the pedagogy they experienced. They could articulate their feelings in relation to classroom atmosphere, classroom management, their sense of security and their well-being. In the main, the students' commentary illustrated their basic wish for a pedagogical experience that is active, interesting and engaging within which they could express themselves and interact with peers and teacher; an experience that reflected the vague pedagogical script that was shaped by curriculum, guideline and evaluation.

However, student voice also demonstrated the impact of the examination on pedagogy. The voices articulated a conflict that seemed to begin in second year, between the students' enjoyment and engagement in active and social learning experiences and their expectation that their teacher will narrow the focus of pedagogy towards passivity and transmission based on the demands of the external examination at Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate.

Act II will explore the teachers' experience of this drama...

Act II: The teachers' voices

Enter the teachers

NINE TEACHERS AFFORDED and facilitated dialogic consultation with their students on their classroom experiences: on relationships with their teacher; on pedagogy; on their peers; and on their feelings and on attitudes relating to how they were progressing with their learning. This process represented a change in practice, role and position identified particularly by teachers but also recognised by some students. Affording voice to students was motivated in these cases, not as a vindication of the students' right to have a say in decision-making under the UNCRC (1992), not by the aforementioned agenda of prefigurative democracy, inclusion or policy imperatives, but by a willingness on behalf of these teachers to engage in research to explore and map student voice in the classroom.

The teachers had no previous experience of student voice. A dialogue and discussion relating to a shared understanding of the concept and the process as envisaged by this research was therefore deemed necessary. As outlined in Chapter Five, teachers were provided with negotiated and agreed instruments following consultation on their format and structure as many teachers feared exposure by what students might write on the questionnaire or might say during the dialogic consultation.

When you hand them a questionnaire you are a bit apprehensive as to what they are actually going to put down

(5th year teacher, Bradfield College).

They initially rejected direct questions posed to students in questionnaires relating to what the students liked or disliked in their classroom experiences. A number of the teachers insisted on alternative questions that focused on the students' engagement and learning, rather than the perceived focus on teaching and the approach of the teacher. Some of the teachers felt threatened by these questions and the possibility of professional exposure by what the students might say. The perception of being judged by the students emerged as both a threat and a constraint.

I suppose it was the first time I ever would have [consulted], I don't think the students knew it but in essence they were judging my classes without really knowing that, and I didn't put it across that way

(Transition year teacher, St Anthony's College).

The idea of choosing how to learn in the class was daunting as they see the teacher with that power. They thought I was carrying out an April fools joke last Friday

(5th year Geography teacher, Castlecourt College).

Negotiation and discussion with the teachers resulted in the neutralising of questions on the questionnaires to more open-ended questions concerning students' engagement and participation. The research design also placed the dialogic consultation in the classroom during the timetabled teaching time for the chosen subject. This situated the process within the interaction and relationship of students and their teacher in the normal setting of their classroom. The teachers further insisted that the researcher should be excluded from observing the dialogic consultation.

One teacher summarised the collective apprehension towards student voice as dialogic consultation in their classroom relationship with their students.

I suppose I was quite apprehensive about it. I was apprehensive about how they would react to it. I was also apprehensive about how they would perceive it and I was apprehensive about my own self as well, about going in and doing it. I was apprehensive that they would see this as some sort of joke and that they wouldn't take it seriously because a teacher asking them their opinions wouldn't happen very much. And I was also a bit apprehensive that they would see this as a weakness in me, asking them something about my teaching that they might see it that there was something wrong with it

(2nd year teacher, Castlecourt College).

This teacher was questioning his personal, ascribed and lived identity of authority in his classroom, and how any change in this would be perceived by the students. 'Apprehension', 'weakness', self-doubt, ridicule and insecurity were the dominant emotions of this teacher. These fears arguably reflect the challenge of student voice to Foucault's concept of normalised practice in his classroom and the perceived threat to the embodiment and enactment of power and authority by the teacher. These fears and apprehension are well documented across student voice research internationally (MacBeath, Demetriou, Rudduck and Myers 2003; Nieto, 1994; Rudduck, 2005; SooHoo, 1993), as is the positive and constructive commentary of students, and increased respect, trust and engagement by students that, in most cases, resolves these apprehensions (Arnot, McIntyre, Pedder, Reay, 2004; Cook-Sather, 2002, 2009; Mitra, 2001; Shor, 1996). However, listening, hearing and engaging with difficult and challenging voices (Bragg, 2001; Fielding 2001; Riley and Docking, 2004; Rudduck and Fielding, 2006) can provide a greater challenge, yet one which has a potentially significant impact for students in the context of inclusion and person-centred democratic practice in the classroom.

A tale of two teachers

Seven of the nine teachers progressed with student voice in their classroom as agreed in advance. They chose their time period within which to have a dialogic consultation that included discussion and a questionnaire. In each case, the teacher reported that they had listened to their students, analysed their questionnaires and introduced changes based on their mediation of the student

commentary. Following a period of a number of weeks during which these changes were enacted and experienced, the students completed a second questionnaire and a reflection sheet. All written documents and responses had been examined by the teacher and provided to the researcher. Two of the teachers however, tailored an alternative route in exploring student voice with different motivations and personal interpretations. Both routes are underpinned by these teachers' decision not to consult directly, or from the outset, with some class groups.

Darina's route through student voice

In Castlecourt College, Darina, the teacher of a second-year Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), and a third-year geography class group, decided to take a different approach to dialogic consultation and student voice with one of her groups. She decided, following an attempt at dialogic discussion and questionnaire completion, that her second-year JCSP students were not capable of dealing with or responding to this type of discussion, or to the completion of a questionnaire. This aforementioned class group were targeted by the school through this programme to support their attendance, retention and progression from primary school, through junior cycle to senior cycle.

Darina decided to embark on a journey to hear the voices of the students through classroom activity. This interpretation involved focusing student voice through participation rather than consultation. In essence, the teacher envisioned student voice as hearing the students respond in class, in engaging with teacher questioning, visual stimuli and cooperative learning activities. She hoped that this interpretation of the process would move her students from her perception of their passive silence to a voiced participation. Underpinning this decision was the teacher's authority and her belief that these students were not capable of responding to dialogic consultation.

The response to questionnaire was not helpful as the students were unwilling or unable to write their responses...I guided them towards their views; they were not sure how to be critical

(2nd year Geography teacher, Castlecourt College).

By 'guiding them towards their views' Darina identified her interference in the consultation process. Her interpretation of their response placed the students as largely passive and her teaching a didactic transmission. An interview extract explained her interpretation.

Interviewer: *And what did they say in the questionnaire and in the discussion to you then when you actually put it to them?*

Teacher: *You see that wasn't as easy... They didn't say we'd like, you know, to be asked questions. They weren't capable of saying that.*

Interviewer: *Ok*

Teacher: *They weren't really able to say, "well [teacher] you don't really explain things"*

Interviewer: *Ok*

Teacher: *My class to them was this lovely experience of looking at things and seeing the lovely photos I had and kind of just accepting the knowledge*

Interviewer: *Ok*

Teacher: *Whereas I maintained what I was doing wrong was that I wasn't engaging their voices and letting me know what they thought of this lovely stuff*

Interviewer: *Ok, that's very interesting*

Teacher: *I actually found that by looking at them (the questionnaires), you know, I still had to engineer the student voice strategies out of my own head*

Interviewer: *Ok, so you didn't get it from the students*

Teacher: *I felt I didn't really*

(Interview with Darina, 2nd year Geography teacher, Castlecourt College).

She described pedagogy as 'this lovely experience of looking at things and seeing the lovely photos I had' and the students' response as 'kind of just accepting the knowledge'. From this she deduced that these students were 'not sure how to be critical'. She therefore decided to ignore the responses to the questionnaires and consultation and proceeded to 'engineer the student voice strategies out of my own head' rather than re-engaging with the students for further clarification. Darina therefore concentrated on student's voices in pedagogy and largely ignored student voice as consultation and dialogue.

This interpretation of student voice and dialogic consultation is based on the teacher's perception of the students as incapable and / or passive. It can be interpreted as a well-intentioned situated and context-based strategy or as the further subjugation and othering of students through a combination of care and control that undermined their capacities for reflection, discussion and critical thinking as identified in research in Irish primary schools (Devine 2003a, 2004). Darina's response also runs counter to student voice research, already cited, that identifies positive responses from marginalised and disaffected students to engaging with their voices in the context of these experiences.

Analysis, by this researcher, of these students' comments on the initial questionnaire, dismissed by Darina, as they 'weren't capable of saying', serves to challenge her perception of their inability to engage in dialogic consultation. Their simple commentary described a classroom experience that was teacher-directed and controlled but that emphasised positive experiences and a classroom culture of order and care. The students described their classroom experience with Darina as:

Teacher asking me stuff, not being sad, slides, explaining things, teacher asking questions, not saying mean things, writing stuff in your copy

Happy, being comfortable, listening, well behaved, being kind, bring in everything you need, looking at slides

When I am getting asked questions and I am watching slide shows. I understand when I am listening and paying attention
(2nd year JCSP students, Castlecourt College).

The extent to which the teacher ‘guided them towards their views’ is unclear but the students demonstrate their capacity to describe their experience in writing and their awareness of the need to be ‘listening and paying attention’. Teacher-direction and control of pedagogy was also evident in terms of ‘getting asked questions’ and the expectation of being ‘well behaved’ and ‘being kind’. In an interview, a small group of these students described their experience in some detail including activity involving worksheets and video, and in this quotation, this student described the aforementioned mind map created by Darina.

She writes up on the board and she puts lines off it and bullet points like mainly what it’s about...mind maps... it’s like when we done the water cycle, she put that on the board and wrote the main words, the key words with it
(2nd year JCSP Geography student, Castlecourt College).

In contrast, Darina did consult with her third-year geography class. These students were a mixed-ability group and were not targeted by the JCSP programme. Darina deemed that these students had the capacity to engage in dialogic consultation. The ‘excellent guidelines’ provided by the students appeared to vindicate her decision, in this case, to facilitate these students to have a voice and to act on their commentary.

I was a bit apprehensive about the initial questionnaire as I was not sure of the feedback I would get to work on. I was really delighted with the response I got as it gave me excellent guidelines on what made them learn
(3rd year Geography teacher, Castlecourt College).

Darina viewed both class groups differently. One she empowered and arguably, privileged (Gunter and Thomas, 2006, 2007) to engage in consultation while the other was bounded and, arguably subjugated; motivated by either care or control reflecting the findings of Devine, 2002. The question therefore arises as to whether Darina viewed these students in the context of their cultural capital. Did she privilege one group because they had the language and the capacity in her view to respond while equally reflecting a hidden discourse that diminished and ‘othered’ the capital of the JCSP students to compete in the classroom as field?

Ultan’s route through student voice

Granting students a voice in the classroom seems to me a fundamentally ethical practice; it breaks down the ancient and increasingly turgid didactic model of teaching
(2nd year and 5th year English teacher, St Anthony’s College).

While acknowledging an ethical and rights-based position on student voice, Ultan, teaching English in St Anthony's College, also avoided dialogic consultation and decided to interpret student voice as the provision of choices to students in pedagogy. Ultan experimented with different approaches to teaching drama in both second year and fifth year and also with giving students choice in their homework tasks.

I had chosen to interpret student voice through allowing them to choose their homework and the choice of learning activities

(2nd year and 5th year English teacher, St Anthony's College).

The rationale for this interpretation was clearly placed once again in the teacher's perception of the students' capacity to engage in dialogue relating to their classroom experiences.

Interviewer: *Interestingly you say you interpreted [student voice] as giving them the choices so that actually puts you a little bit more in control in that you can do this or this or this rather than really asking them what they wanted*

Teacher: *No. I gave them options to show them the different kinds of things that you could do because I don't think they would have known had I said right what do you want to do.*

Interviewer: *Ok.*

Teacher: *They wouldn't have the self-confidence and the vocabulary to articulate that. At the start there was a lot of kind of modelling of different kinds of activities that you might do to learn.*

Interviewer: *Ok.*

Teacher: *But after a while they would say you know, we liked that; that worked; can we do that for this part of the class?*

(2nd year and 5th year English teacher, St Anthony's College).

Ultan gave his second-year students a choice in their classroom experiences. The students recognised this as consultation and identified Ultan's direction in relation to choices in their commentary as:

[Teacher] asked us in the discussion would you rather sit down and do notes or would you rather go and do the activities and the acting

The choices were his idea...we did not suggest them

We got a choice when doing the poem 'Nettles', of acting it out or writing down the important lines as drawings with the lines written under it

(2nd year English students, St Anthony's College).

Ultan, however, pre-judged his fifth-year student's capacity to engage in dialogue and consultation... 'they wouldn't have the self-confidence and the vocabulary to articulate that'. They were provided with 'options' that limited their choices. His justification for this was based on his experience of the fifth-year students' disengagement in class:

A significant minority really don't want to be at school...their experience of school is low grades and low expectations for themselves...the first move was to give them a choice of activities in the class room

(2nd year and 5th year English teacher, St Anthony's College).

Ultan decided how student voice was to be navigated with this group based on their disengagement. Without attempting to engage the students in dialogue in advance, he had decided to give them limited choices and experiment with different teaching methods, and then ask the students for their reaction. These students' reactions, as cited in Act I, recognised the choices presented and, contesting Ultan's perception, in their interview, both demonstrated a capacity to critically engage with the value of the choices presented, and to recognise the impact on their engagement and participation that one student described as 'brings me out of my sleepy frame of mind'.

The actions of both Ultan and Darina pointed to the complexity of student voice, the power of the teacher and the risk of privileging some voices. Student voice research findings point to the risk of embracing a discourse of power that privileges voices that are familiar and that share the language and capital of the teacher to the exclusion of those who do not (Bragg, 2001, 2007b; Morgan and Proctor, 2011). Research findings also point to students capacity to comment in a meaningful way on their experiences based on trust and relationship in the context of right and democratic practice (Bragg, 2007b; Fielding, 2011; Lynch and Lodge, 2002; Rudduck, 2000, 2003; Rudduck and Flutter, 2004b; Smyth, Banks and Calvert, 2011; SooHoo, 1993). The student voice process arguably needs to be scaffolded by teachers and schools to facilitate the build-up of trust and a positive atmosphere (Cook-Sather, 2002; MacBeath, Demetriou, Rudduck and Myers, 2003) and some researchers indicate the need to develop a shared conceptual language in schools and classrooms relating to student voice (Cook-Sather 2007; Thomson, 2007).

Ultan's and Darina's decisions to somewhat exclude or limit two of their class groups from dialogic consultation runs counter to research already cited, that demonstrates that engaging students in consultation and decision-making has a positive impact on failure and dropout rates particularly in schools in the USA and Australia (Bland, 2011; Mitra, 2001, 2004, 2007) arising from their engagement with student voice. Student voice research in Ireland warns of the risk of limited or tokenistic gestures leading to passivity and a lack of challenge for already marginalised students and those with special educational needs (Shevlin and Rose, 2003), while deep engagement with the voices of marginalised students develops positive identities, self-esteem and confidence (Rose, Shevlin, 2010). Involving students in negotiation on the content of their Physical Education (PE) programme in an Irish second-level school demonstrated increased motivation, participation and relevance to the students (Enright and O'Sullivan, 2008, 2010, 2012).

Over the period of the school year, while displaying some apprehension, all the teachers engaged with their students' commentary through student voice, whether through dialogue and consultation

as was the case in the majority, or with two class groups in particular, through the activation of voice in pedagogy or through the provision of limited choices. The students' reactions have already emerged. For now the drama is with the teachers' voices.

The teachers' experience

All nine teachers engaged in this research responded positively in their affordance and experience of student voice and eight implemented changes in their practice due to the dialogic consultation. Student voice presented no significant commentary for change to one of the teachers. As outlined, students in Mathematics and Economics, taught by Finbarr in Bradfield College, did not request any significant changes to their classroom experiences.

The other eight teachers seemed positively disposed to the actual process of consultation and to reacting to the students' comments.

They actually reacted extremely well to being consulted and had plenty of opinions as to what could and couldn't be done

(1st year History teacher, Bradfield College).

Consulting with the students made them feel so much a part of it really and led me to believe that their interest was going to be so much more if I did consult with them

(2nd year CSPE teacher, St Anthony's College).

I was encouraged that they could give me feedback whether good or bad because I can certainly learn and improve in my teaching

(3rd Geography teacher, Castlecourt College).

The students' commentary pointed teachers in conflicting directions. Younger students and those in TY and those in fifth-year geography complemented the rhetoric of the pedagogical script of curriculum in their commentary, and encouraged teachers towards active, engaging and participative pedagogies that they described as interesting and enjoyable. These placed pedagogy closer to a social constructivist theoretical framing than that described as their normal routine practice in advance of dialogic consultation. Nevertheless, contestation and conflict emerged as early as second year as the examinations script featured in students' commentary and continued through third year and up to Leaving Certificate in some subjects. The script was symbolised by maintenance or a return to note taking. For other subjects, particularly second-year mathematics and fifth-year geography, the commentary focused on a return to or the continuation of student-centred and active pedagogy.

The students have already identified this range of complex changes and modifications in their individual comments to their teacher. The teachers' voices echoed the students' commentary in recognising their requests for changes.

Considering what the students spoke and wrote about I decided to do something completely different in this theory class

(TY Sport Science teacher, St Anthony's College).

It was all leading to group work so group work has become the major focus of the class

(2nd year Geography teacher, Castlecourt College).

The idea of having group work including things like quizzes where they could gather together and share information with a common goal rather than being individually put to the test

(2nd year Science teacher, St Anthony's College).

Certainly there was more group work. We did a project assessment, which they had to go research, which was one thing; I certainly took from it [the students' comments] more research-based learning

(2nd year CSPE teacher, St Anthony's College).

Based on the discussion class it was clear that visual stimuli and oral feedback were the two key factors in their learning in class

(1st year History teacher, Bradfield College).

In one classroom a request for a notes copy, signalled by a small group of students but recognised by the majority after its introduction, brought a very positive reaction from the teacher concerned in the context of the impact of the consultation.

By listening to the students' voices a greater variety of teaching took place. In particular the use of the notes copy was a major change for me. It was something that I would not have done at all with the class had it not been for students' voice

(2nd year Geography teacher, Castlecourt College).

Overall, the teachers engaged openly and positively with student voice as dialogic consultation. They did not contest the student's suggestions and were open to their implementation, with the exception of TY Sport Science in Castlecourt College, which is discussed below. Boundaries, however, emerged strongly in the teachers' commentary on their experience of student voice.

Boundaries to student voice – Who is centre stage?

The 'stage' boundaries had been set by normal practice and by the authority of the teacher in the classroom based on the script of curriculum and examination that reflected Foucault's discourse of practice, power and control. All the teachers identified changes in these boundaries through their affordance and experience of student voice. Some teachers welcomed the reflection and potential change in these notional boundaries. Many of the teachers commented on the positive effect of

consultation and co-construction based on student voice as the reduction or the removal of boundaries between student and teachers in the classroom.

We had the discussion about changing it. Maybe it just brought down the barrier a little bit you know

(6th year Mathematics teacher, Bradfield College).

I tried to, I suppose, blur the boundaries slightly...it's a process where they can engage with the teacher and each other ... I don't like this idea of teacher dispensing ideas and students just sitting there listening

(2nd year Science teacher, St Anthony's College).

The recognition of these boundary lines and their adjustment in the minds of the teacher was also indicative of a potential change in the teachers' position in relation to their power and authority in the classroom. The identification of a 'line' represented the limit and closed border to the extent to which the teacher was willing to move in terms of relinquishing power and control in the classroom.

Students can speak and they are free to ask questions and you know there isn't any problem but you know at the same time there is a line that you don't go over

(2nd year Geography teacher, Castlecourt College).

Another perceived the consultation and the students' reaction as somewhat challenging to the authority of the teacher and as a potential threat to their control of the students and pedagogy.

They were probably testing boundaries and not really sure how far to go

(TY Sport Science teacher, St Anthony's College).

The comments indicate teachers' awareness of the potential change in relationship within the authoritative boundaries of the classroom. Teachers and students recognised these relationships, although it was the students who spoke openly and enthusiastically about the effect of the consultation. They perceived their increased agency and freedom to comment as growing respect and care from their teacher. Teachers, whose authority and power had privileged students with a voice in pedagogy, were now more circumspect in relation to boundaries. This circumspection seemed to reference Foucault's established discourse of truths that student voice had challenged through the discontinuity emerging from students' commentary. One teacher however spoke of a clearly fixed 'line', while in another situation in TY sport science, outlined in more detail below, student voice resulted in a sense of threat or challenge to the boundaries relating to teacher and student roles, positions and classroom management.

Curriculum and examination as boundaries

The demands of the curriculum and examination script presented clear yet flexible boundaries for teachers, which were framed within the structural demands of teaching in a post-primary school.

These were the demands on the allocation of available teaching time, the length of the subject syllabus and the structure of the examination and its modes of assessment. Teachers continually articulated the power of curriculum and the examination and its impact and boundary to their classroom practice and on their sustained engagement with student voice.

Ian in St Anthony's, while positive about affording students a voice, cites syllabus and the time pressures of examinations as clear and limiting boundaries for sustained student voice.

The syllabus is so tightly packed that if I'm very honest, if you got to the later stages of third year and also with Leaving Certificate...it can be too time consuming even though it [student voice] is very beneficial

(2nd year Science teacher, St Anthony's College).

Edward, teaching TY sport science makes a similar point. He emphasises the pressure of points and 'rote' learning, referring to the pressure on teachers towards transmission and teacher directed pedagogy. Both teachers identify syllabus and examination as boundaries to the development and establishment of student voice.

I think it would be very positive but I think it would take a lot of persuasion because of the fear factor especially when they get to Leaving Cert with the amount of emphasis that's on points and rote learning

(TY teacher, St Anthony's College).

Ultan's comment also reflected this boundary. His choice of pedagogy as drama in his English class in junior cycle had challenged the pressure of curriculum and examination. However, he later recognised the pressure of the syllabus.

I wish I had more time for this activity but the press of time due to the demands of the syllabus makes it impossible really

(2nd year English teacher, St Anthony's College).

The pressure of time is a recurrent theme that references the 'demands of syllabus', the externally imposed curriculum script that is defined by content but that provides a limited and vague pedagogical script. 'This activity' in this case refers to Ultan's decision to use drama in teaching poetry to second-year English students. It also reflected the challenge of some of these second-year students in their demand for notes.

Topics to be 'covered', and the associated pressure of time and examination also became the boundary for Tom in teaching Geography to second-year students in Castlecourt. He clearly articulated this boundary to his engagement with student voice.

No matter what the students said...in third year it's very much chalk and talk...I don't really have the time, three classes a week, and you are trying to get them into exam practice and giving them tests maybe once a week as much

as possible...you don't really have time...you are not going to get something major covered

(2nd year Geography teacher, Castlecourt College).

Tom's articulation of his experience of teaching third-year of junior cycle class groups clearly established the boundary for his class. His citing of 'chalk and talk' and 'exam practice' symbolised a return to teacher-directed transmission pedagogy to complete the curriculum script and fulfil the professional role and expectation of examination preparation. The comment reflects the contestation, although very limited in the case of his class group, between student-centred active pedagogy and examinations that was articulated by some of the students and symbolised by the request for and the reaction to the notes copy.

The majority of the students had requested and subsequently experienced increased active and engaging pedagogy in their classes. However, curriculum and examination seemed to move to centre stage as teachers succumbed to the power of the examination and the curriculum discourse and to the requests of other groups of students who had signalled their demand for passive note taking as a means of mediating the curriculum towards examination success. The dilemma once again reflected the challenge of addressing the requests of the 'cacophony of competing voices' (Reay 2006, p. 179).

Teachers' expression of this challenge mirrored the commentary of their students as the demand for the provision of notes surfaced. Tom's recollection of the notes copy request in second-year geography in Castlecourt symbolised this dilemma for teachers.

Students found the book difficult for revision and would prefer to have notes of their own in a dedicated notes copy. This was a technique / strategy that I did not use

(2nd year Geography teacher, Castlecourt College).

Hilda, teaching CSPE to a second year group in St Anthony's also recognised the demand for notes that increased as students advance towards the Junior Certificate examination.

If they were a third-year group they would be looking for notes on the blackboard

(2nd year CSPE teacher, St Anthony's College).

Once the students advanced to fifth year, teachers recognised the practice and expectation as embedded, and in some cases the teachers saw the practice as having very positive benefits for students. Ultan's comment in relation to his disengaged fifth-year English class illustrated the embedded nature of the practice for some students.

They do know how to write notes off the board, this they have training and experience in

(5th year English teacher, St Anthony's College).

For Finbarr in Bradfield College, the provision of notes to students in Mathematics classes was established practice and was endorsed by the students' commentary. Finbarr's comment supports his students' view and embeds the boundary of the curriculum and the examination, and its impact on pedagogy and on the students' experience in the classroom.

Taking notes clearly benefits students...they have easy access to information if needed on showing them how to work out problems from given examples. It provides them with a sense of security when they have to go home and work out questions themselves

(6th year Mathematics teacher, Bradfield College).

It is clear however, from the voices of some of the students and the articulated reactions of the teachers, that student voice finds its expression in student's desire for active, participative and social constructivist pedagogy. However, this is circumscribed by the pressure and expectations placed on teachers by the script and power discourse of curriculum and examination.

Testing the boundaries – Transition Year students in St Anthony's

Transition Year (TY) is a one-year programme that provides a break in the examination cycle for post-primary students. TY was compulsory for students in Bradfield and Castlecourt, and was optional in St Anthony's College. The programme is designed to offer students the opportunity to explore areas of experience outside of the examination-based curriculum of junior and senior cycle.

A Transition Year offers pupils a broad educational experience with a view to the attainment of increased maturity, before proceeding to further study and/or vocational preparation

(Department of Education, 1993).

Reflecting the general vagueness in reference to pedagogy visible in other syllabus documents, TY guidelines again specify that...

Pupils will participate in learning strategies which are active and experiential and which help them to develop a range of transferable critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills

(*ibid.*).

TY students' descriptions of passive note taking in their classes in both Bradfield and St Anthony's seemed to challenge the expectations articulated in this policy script. These students requested change and both teachers, Edward in St Anthony's and Declan in Bradfield, responded. The students were very positive in their recognition of the changes introduced. A closer analysis of this process with the TY class in St Anthony's is worthwhile. The situation reflected how examinations could also impact on the students' experience of TY and how student voice can challenge this.

Edward's comment relating to the consultation illustrated the nature of his pedagogical practice in TY sport science in reference to the position of note taking. He seemed to expect the reaction he received through consultation and dialogue, but was concerned that the students would use the opportunity provided by student voice to, in some way, challenge his authority by using student voice strategically to reduce note taking in their class.

I knew going to the TYs that it was going to be less notes and more videos, they were not bogged down by end-of-year exams, they saw it as an opportunity to get less notes

(TY Sports Science teacher, St Anthony's College).

Edward followed the suggestions of some of the girls in the class in reducing the extent of note taking but not its elimination, as requested by the boys. He recognised the students' positive reaction and had a sense of improved learning and understanding, but he also noted some unwelcome consequences relating to behaviour and classroom management.

Students reacted well especially as they did not have to write down all the notes in the class, instead they wrote a summary which students probably got more from

As students were taking less notes than normal I did find that they were less settled and definitely more hyper in class...there are opportunities for less interested students to take a back seat in class

(TY Sports Science teacher, St Anthony's College).

Edward's conflict related to the students' requests for less notes and a more interactive and visual experience, the absences of a textbook for this topic, and the challenge of engaging in debate and discussion without a basic understanding of concepts in the absence of 'prior knowledge' or 'prior experience'. Edward recounted his dilemma as:

They wanted more videos, more we'll say discussion, less notes is the key thing they wanted, which wasn't a bad thing really, right, but because they have no books it's very important for them to have a certain amount of information written down

I think the problem with something like drugs in sport they have no prior knowledge, prior experience of any of that and I think I need to deliver a certain amount of information before I can engage debate

(TY Sports Science teacher, St Anthony's College).

In response to the students' requests Edward introduced discussion and debates to replace some of the note taking. As a new experience, with which students seemed unfamiliar, classroom management issues emerged. Edward's diary entries trace his reaction to these changes in his classroom practice.

Was comfortable with it but there was certainly more noise, more background noise in the classroom, which is ok but sometimes they were so excited a lot of the time they were shouting over each other

In the classroom I found it difficult to keep students on task...I found in the discussions the more boisterous students really wanted to be heard and this gave less opportunity for quieter students to speak, students became impatient and kept speaking out of turn

I think the first few lessons I was getting frustrated by it. I think they were getting very excited by the fact that they were almost allowed come in when they wanted to come in

(TY Sports Science teacher, St Anthony's College)..

As a control mechanism, Edward focused on re-structuring the class and introduced tasks in the form of work sheets as an accountability and attention focusing mechanism to get the students to gather the key points at the end on the discussions.

After last week's class I was more aware of the need for structure in the class so I had a series of hand-outs ready for students to fill in after each section of the class

(TY Sports Science teacher, St Anthony's College).

Edward was reactive in changing strategies but was also frustrated by the student's behaviour in class. The situation, and his reactions, illustrates the complexity of student voice for the teacher and the difficulty of mediating competing scripts and voices.

I was definitely getting more from them; they weren't just coming in and getting their pads out and writing. You know if I asked questions they were asking more questions of me which is a very positive thing

They were probably testing boundaries and not really sure how far to go

I would use the debate format again but I would have to make it slightly more structured at the start or spend more time at the beginning explaining the format and rules of it

(TY Sports Science teacher, St Anthony's College).

Student voice presented significant questions for Edward by challenging the established discourse of the classroom that positioned him with the power to ensure the continuity of normal practice from third year into TY through his provision of notes to students. It challenged the issue of dealing with students' lack of previous knowledge of TY sport science, as this programme had been developed by Edward as a module for study in TY to complement the PE syllabi for junior and senior cycle. The need to manage the poor classroom behaviour was an unexpected challenge. These challenges tested the boundaries of student voice for Edward. They reflected discontinuity in the context of Foucault, in that the absence of the power and control of the examination in TY and the challenge to normalised practice provided by the voices of the students appeared to create a new domain of truth that seemed to reposition Edward's power and authority.

However, Edward recognised some improvement in engagement and understanding as a result of the changes he introduced, but the challenge to his authority and control based on his frustration at his students' behaviour seemed to blur the boundaries of his positive relationship with his students.

His reflections of the lessons pointed him towards the imposition of a tighter and more formalised structure to activities like debates and discussions that may have heretofore been unfamiliar to students in his class. His experience and reflection on student voice provided, on one hand, a further indication of how didactic pedagogy limited the students' potential to experience the openness of TY, and on the other, the need to scaffold and support students in new pedagogical experiences introduced following their suggestions, and the need to be aware of unforeseen reactions, in this case 'that they were less settled and definitely more hyper in class'.

Edward's experiences further underscore the need for student voice to be supported and structured to allow for the establishment of trust within a positive classroom atmosphere of co-construction (Cook-Sather, 2002; MacBeath, Demetriou, Rudduck and Myers, 2003).

These experiences in TY draw the drama towards the question of the outcomes of student voice.

The question of outcomes of student voice

The students had clearly articulated a positive reaction regarding relationships, and engaging and participative pedagogy coupled with a growing concern for examination preparation. For the teachers, the unfolding drama in relation to outcomes is more complex. The complexity concerns students' learning and engagement, teachers' authority, sustainability and the potential for the transformation of pedagogy.

Students' progress, learning and engagement

All teachers recognised some level of increased understanding or improved assessment outcomes in the form of examination grades following their engagement with the student voice process from consultation to action. The only exception was the teacher of Mathematics and Economics in Bradfield who had not implemented any changes, as the students had requested none. Teachers' voices outlined quantifiable outcomes, using the language of examination, as improved grades or improved performance in classroom-based tests. These teachers linked these improvements to their introduction and sustaining of student-centred strategies outlined in these comments as 'working in groups', 'discussion and stimulus-driven questions' and 'discussions'.

I have seen students come up grades, not just Christmas and summer, I regularly give chapter tests as we go along to see how students are doing and definitely students grades have come up as a result of working in groups

(2nd year Science teacher, St Anthony's College)

A student, who scored in a lower range on written grades, was much more engaged by student voice in discussion and stimulus-driven questions.

Furthermore, the strategies themselves brought out a much deeper understanding of the topic being studied

(1st year History teacher, Bradfield College).

In the discussions that we had, in the homework they produced and even in the summer exam which was given at the end of the module, the students learned and understood more about this topic, comparatively, than in earlier modules

(TY History teacher, Bradfield College).

Interestingly, both history class groups in Bradfield College, taught by Declan, displayed increased learning to their teacher following his reflection on the students' commentary from both class groups. Ultan, teaching fifth-year English in Castlecourt, whose students voiced their disengagement, also recognised improved learning following his sustained use of drama in studying English texts.

Yea well I mean it's quite hard to measure in terms of attainment but I would say, at that time we were on act two of Hamlet and just this week now I have been going back through the quotations just before the summer test and their knowledge of that scene is better than any other

(5th year English teacher, St Anthony's College).

One student in this fifth-year class surprised Ultan with a comment that reinforced his belief in his strategy relating to drama but also his provision of choices to these students.

Just today in the last class I had with them a student came to me and said she'd never liked English before and thanked me...there are vast differences in motivations and self-discipline in that room but you know I think some of them have responded really well to the opportunities

(5th year English teacher, St Anthony's College).

Evidence of learning also emerged through the quality of students' written work. In the case of fifth-year geography in St Anthony's this quality was linked, by Ita, to the students' continued engagement in the active student-centred pedagogy that was endorsed by her students. She contrasts this with the original passivity of some students in her class. Ita also recognised the students as becoming more confident and active in participating, and in engaging deeply with the subject matter through co-operative learning, questioning and discussion.

From correction of esker write ups it is becoming increasingly evident that by active participation in class, group and class discussion, peer questioning, their own written work has improved greatly...it is more logical and shows greater understanding. It is not appearing as something just learned off

(5th year Geography teacher, Castlecourt College).

Seeing students asking and answering questions of other students demonstrated higher-order thinking and an investigative approach...this was evident in students who had originally been passive in their learning

(5th year Geography teacher, Castlecourt College).

Ita also recognised a further benefit of engagement with active student-centred pedagogy in Geography as endorsed and encouraged by student voice. The pace of her lessons increased.

I also felt that the material was covered faster than I normally would get it done. I put this down to the active teaching methodologies that I felt helped the students to learn

(5th year Geography teacher, Castlecourt College).

Hilda's second year CSPE students, whose initial commentary reflected the conflict between their desire for active engagement and their perceived need for notes, became engaged in a project relating to the justice system organised by Hilda, arising from their comments. Hilda's subsequent 'judgement' pointed to improved learning of 'specific things' through active engagement in cooperative learning for participants.

Students expressed that they would remember specific things about the courts service because of this learning, they felt they learned easier by doing and this would remain with them

(2nd year CSPE teacher, St Anthony's College).

I noticed that students that were in groups who might have individually struggled at times...benefited from being part of that

(2nd year CSPE teacher, St Anthony's College).

Hilda also identified other positive outcomes for students arising from their actions following the dialogic consultation that indicated an increased voice in pedagogy and enjoyment of their active engagement.

I found the students were eager to present their findings and to discuss their learning.... I really enjoyed going in and knowing that they were excited about it

(2nd year CSPE teacher, St Anthony's College).

Ian, teaching second-year science in St Anthony's identified increased student engagement and enjoyment of theory classes. Such engagement and enjoyment had been confined to practical science classes. His introduction of group work and quizzes, as prompted by the students, had effected this change.

They always love the practical classes but I saw an element of that coming into the theory classes when they knew they had group work and quizzes...there was more of a level of enjoyment

(2nd year Science teacher, St Anthony's College).

TY students also displayed increased engagement, enjoyment and learning following the implementation of the significant changes that they had suggested in their commentary on their TY experiences. Both teachers, Declan in Bradfield and Edward in St Anthony's, recognised very positive improvements in students' learning and in active engagement arising from the changes they introduced following the consultation.

Even if they didn't equate enjoyment with a better way of learning they certainly knew they enjoyed it more...if enjoyment comes into it, there is definitely more learning going on

(TY Sport Science teacher, St Anthony's College).

There was more interaction and noise and I wasn't asking one-on-one questions, there was a more air of discussion

(TY History teacher, Bradfield College).

The inclusion of all the voices in the classroom was another outcome of student voice identified particularly by teachers in junior cycle classes. Teachers, in the context of these large class groups recognised how the often silent or quieter students were now visible and contributing in lessons. In History in Bradfield College, Declan, whose students had made significant comment about their experience in his class, had changed his teaching approaches and now recognised the inclusion of the less assertive voices.

Their voices came out more, they were more willing, even the quieter students in class

(1st year History teacher, Bradfield College).

Declan also recognised the importance of the careful structuring of the student groups in cooperative learning to encourage inclusion in mixed-ability settings.

Grouping of stronger and weaker students worked well

(1st year History teacher, Bradfield College).

Similarly, Ian, also clearly identified the inclusion of students who may have just been passive 'shy or retiring.'

Just coming away from grades, there are always the sort of students who would be very shy and retiring and unless you call their name in the roll or directly ask them a question you would never hear their voice from one end of the class to the other, from one week to the next. So I think it brought more out of those

(2nd year Science teacher, St Anthony's College).

A small number of his second-year science students had requested attention to the composition of groups for group work and particularly that students would not be confined to the same group but rather that they would be rotated between groups. Having acted on this suggestion, Ian identified further gains in the inclusion of these quieter students.

When I was making teams out specifically for quizzes and things like that I put thought into who would work well maybe together because I do have a number of students who would be quite shy and if you put them in the wrong group maybe you mightn't get the best out of them. They might even retire further

(2nd Year Science teacher, St Anthony's College).

Of the nine teachers involved in the research, just two negative comments relating to student voice outcomes emerged. Edward cited his frustration at the challenge created by the reduction in note

taking in TY and his students' difficulty and unfamiliarity in engaging in orderly debate and discussion. He equated this with the changes in his pedagogy arising from student voice.

On a few occasions I just had to stop and said, right, I know what we're doing, you know what we're doing. I'm delighted to be getting more voice but there's certain times when there's too much noise in the classroom and nobody is getting anything from it because everybody wants to get their point across

(TY Sport Science teacher, St Anthony's College).

As already outlined above, Edward managed this issue through restructuring his approach.

Ita's positive endorsement of student voice and related student-centred pedagogy with her fifth-year geography class contrasted somewhat with her experience with second-year mathematics. Her students had made significant comment for change in her mathematics class, which she introduced. The students reacted very positively to these changes, nevertheless, Ita, while recognising the students' engagement and the role of student voice, was concerned about the pace of her teaching with an obvious eye to the demands of curriculum and examination script.

I feel everything is working excellently, in particular students' active involvement in the completion or achieving of my learning outcomes. I will say however that I am working at a slower pace. Then though it is right that students are setting the pace

(2nd year Mathematics teacher, Castlecourt College).

Authority and power – losing centre stage?

Teachers' commentary on their view of student voice as experienced and its impact on their authority and power in the classrooms centred on their relationship with their students, their fears in relation to classroom management and student behaviour, and the boundaries imposed by curriculum and examination on their perceived capacity to engage with and extend student-centred active pedagogy.

Darina's comment in relation to junior-cycle geography reflects both the teachers' position and the students' comments in relation to dialogic consultation and their positive relationship with their teacher.

A new found respect as in like I am the teacher but I am helping them, to bring them along in their education, but I want them to be able to control to some extent how they are going to learn and invite them to give ideas

(3rd year Geography teacher, Castlecourt).

Following their engagement with student voice teachers' comments relating to control also emerged, mirroring their apprehension at the outset of the process. Interestingly, following an almost completely positive experience with student voice, teachers still articulated comments relating to control. In Bradfield, Declan's comment, summarised the issue of control.

Student voice requires some relinquishing of control but not in a disciplinary sense...a culture shock...letting them take control of their own learning... the risk of group work... the danger of things getting out of control

(1st year History teacher, Bradfield College).

Tom, in Castlecourt stressed his positive experience of experimentation with pedagogy, in his case with the notes copy, and was clear in resolving any apprehension in relation to classroom control.

This was very positive, I feel like saying to colleagues try something different, you won't lose control of your class

(2nd year Geography teacher, Castlecourt College).

Finbarr, in Bradfield College, commenting in relation to his fifth-year economics class was more cautious in his concern for control, contextualising the experience relative to the composition of different class groups. He was not prepared to give an unqualified endorsement and displayed an underlying insecurity that some students could potentially take advantage of any freedom that student voice would afford them.

I think that I would have to know the class group first, the knowledge of the class would be whether these students are just going to use this power of deciding how things are going to be taught inside in a class, are they going to use this to their advantage to avoid work

(5th year Economics teacher, Bradfield College)

Ita, in Castlecourt, provided an insightful reflection on the issue of authority, control and insecurity by referencing ownership. She equated student voice with student ownership of learning but structure, scaffolding and by implication, control, kept the focus on learning, therefore bounding the potential for lack of control.

The students in general took ownership of their learning process. One shouldn't fear that they take ownership of class. Clear concise instructions at the initial stages highlighting the long-term goal of attempting to make learning and retention easier, limits potential students from thinking it is a free rein

(5th year Geography teacher, Castlecourt College).

Teachers, in Bradfield, Castlecourt and St Anthony's, identified clear positive outcomes for students' engagement and participation in the classroom through engagement with student voice, and student-centred active pedagogy. They also identified clear gains in learning measured by test grades, written work and particularly by students' engagement in higher-order discussion and questioning. Positive relationships and the inclusion of all students, including those who were often silent or silenced by pedagogy or interaction, was a further positive outcome. Some teachers were concerned for their power, authority and control, underpinned by a fear that students could push the boundaries in Foucauldian terms through being afforded a voice in their classroom experiences. Teachers' engagement with student voice was also significantly challenged and limited to varying degrees by their perception of the curriculum and examination that provided

surveillance and the established discourse of power and control within the school hierarchy. This pressure, symbolised in pedagogy by the provision of notes, clearly reflected the challenge presented by some students' voices in relation to their needs, demands and expectations concerning examinations.

Student voice research reflects many of these findings. Increased feelings of belonging for students in schools and classrooms, the inclusion of marginalised and silenced students, and the associated development of positive relationships and trust are all associated with the establishment and support for student voice in schools and classrooms (Cook-Sather, 2002, 2006, 2009, 2010; Fielding, 1999; Fielding and McGregor, 2005; Flutter and Rudduck, 2004; Thompson, 2007). Improved learning and motivation arising from these gains have also been identified in schools and classroom (Cook-Sather 2002; Mitra 2004; Smyth, 2007; Wilson and Corbett 2007).

Fielding (2011) while envisioning student voice as central to a school and classroom culture, as person-centred and participatory, based on listening and dialogue, also identified regressive pedagogy limiting the active role of the student and focusing of outcomes and examination performance. He linked regressive pedagogy to student voice initiatives that were motivated by school accountability, improvement and performativity mainly in England. However, it is obvious that curriculum and examination have a similar regressive influence on pedagogy in these case-study classrooms which limits and bounds the evident potential for student voice in developing an active student-centred pedagogy, notwithstanding the complexity of identity, subject, authority and school and classroom culture.

The question of sustained change

The question of a sustained effect of student voice on teacher identity and practice in these schools is framed within the experiences and reflections of the two teachers from Bradfield College based on their navigation of student voice in this research.

Two teachers – two roads – one less travelled

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I —
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference
Robert Frost (1874–1963)*

Declan who taught History, and Finbarr, a mathematics and economics teacher looked down the road mapped out following their engagement with student voice. One road was bounded by

pedagogy of established classroom routine, curriculum and examination reflecting teacher-directed and teacher-centred pedagogy that placed students as largely silent and passive. The other, revealed by the voices of the history students allowed active, engaged and participating students to emerge ‘on stage’ informed by dialogue and interaction, and person-centred democratic principles.

A mathematics teacher - Finbarr

*Long I stood and looked down one as far as I could
to where it bent in the undergrowth*

Robert Frost (1874–1963)

Finbarr had experienced very positive commentary from his sixth-year mathematics students. Their comments reflected a clear focus on curriculum and examination, culminating in their request that their experience would not change as they approached their Leaving Certificate examination. Their very limited commentary for change focused on the perception by a small number of students in the class that questions posed by other students should not be discussed as they wasted class time. Interestingly, dialogue as student voice, seemed to reveal a hidden curriculum from these students that discouraged dialogue and discussion in pedagogy. What the students valued was teacher-directed teaching that delivered the key to examination success. The method, so lauded by these students, centred on teacher notes, and reflected a practice of teacher-directed, transmission in the teaching of Mathematics. The students confirmed Finbarr’s position of power and authority though their desire for the maintenance of their normalised and institutionalised practice in the classroom. Echoing Foucault’s normalising judgements, their comments also confirmed the established hierarchy of practice, of what is experienced, valued and learned in this classroom. He described this valued practice as:

(I) write up the notes on the board and all the lads write them into their hard-back copies. I do make them do some maths questions in class
(6th year Mathematics teacher, Bradfield College).

One student’s description of the routine of the classroom mirrored Finbarr’s description.

*The teacher writes up the answer line by line and the student writes it down.
The teacher explains what is happening and the students ask questions if they are confused or unsure*
(6th year Mathematics student, Bradfield College).

The students wanted no changes to this classroom experience. However, the students’ responses triggered some reflection in Finbarr relating to his teaching practice and the culture of teaching of Mathematics in Bradfield. He described how the students comments:

Made me think of me as a teacher, reflected – want to move away from notes and practising questions to discussion – toward IT – hung up or limited by notes method

(6th year Mathematics teacher, Bradfield College).

Nevertheless, tradition, students' expectations and established pedagogical practice reflecting the pressure of curriculum and examination further informed Finbarr's reflection and his subsequent decision to continue with the classroom practice that the students so strongly endorsed. His reflections on tradition, notes, and on the pressure of examinations clearly influenced his decision not to alter his teaching of Mathematics even though his original reflections, based on student voice, had emphasised 'discussion' and being 'limited by notes'. His diary entries point to established practice...

Students are happy with the traditional method

I am always conscious that we must get a certain amount of notes completed so that we can be ready for the 'pre' [examination] in February

(6th year Mathematics teacher, Bradfield College).

Finbarr's reflections and subsequent decision also mirror the conflict articulated by mathematics teachers in relation to the implementation of Project Maths (NCCA, 2012). These teachers, as already outlined, spoke of their wish to return to 'drill and practice' and 'chalk and talk' (*ibid.*, p. 14) teaching methods due to the pressure of the examination on sixth-year mathematics teaching. Nevertheless, his decision to maintain his current practice runs counter to the recommendations on notes and teacher-directed practice that were highlighted in the WSE-MLL report (Inspectorate, 2012) on Bradfield College.

In his interview, Finbarr introduced another pressure influencing his decision. When asked had he discussed student voice and his thoughts arising from the students' comments with other mathematics teachers, he responded that he did not and felt that he could not raise these issues with other colleagues:

I'd say now their backs would go up straight away. I'd say they would be like 'who the hell, who does he think he is'...I think that maybe that would be too far for most people to take...I am comfortable enough to discuss that idea with certain staff members but I'm not sure now that I'd throw that out in a general staff meeting because...I don't think people would see that positively necessarily and would see it as a teacher siding with students rather than staff. So I'd leave that one go

(6th year Mathematics teacher, Bradfield College).

Finbarr, as a younger member of the teaching staff, felt in some way threatened by the power of the institutionalised practices of both the mathematics teachers and the wider teaching staff in Bradfield. He could not countenance the prospect of openly discussing his student voice experiences with other staff members and arguably this also contributed to this decision to continue

with his traditional teacher-directed pedagogy. For Finbarr, the road chosen reflected the security of conforming to established practice relating to pedagogy and teacher authority in Bradfield College. His comment on his fear of being viewed as ‘a teacher siding with students’ is particularly telling and insightful of the established culture of Bradfield.

He concluded his reflection by placing student voice as an element of pedagogy rather than as dialogic consultation:

Their voice in my class has found optimal level through questioning, pacing and individual attention. I will try to do this on the content but will not transform my classes

(6th year Mathematics teacher, Bradfield College).

The detail of Finbarr’s experience provides further insight into the challenges for student voice in Irish post-primary schools in the absence of a rights-based framework. The teacher’s position of authority determines pedagogy, as bounded by curriculum, examination, and the role, if any, for student voice within this situated discourse.

‘I took the one less travelled by...’ - a history teacher - Declan

Declan taught History in Bradfield College for more than twenty years and was a senior member of staff. In contrast to Finbarr, he had an experience with student voice that significantly changed his practice as a teacher. Declan’s first-year and TY history students made significant comment for change in their experience in his classroom. Students’ comments indicated a didactic teacher-centred experience while their requests sought increased use of visual imagery to illustrate history topics and less ‘drilling of facts’ in the form of note taking.

The students’ comments triggered serious reflection by Declan on his teaching and, based on his students’ commentary he significantly changed his teaching approaches. The central elements of his reflection focused on the teacher-directed style that the students had identified.

I thought I was totally student centred but was I really? The experience with the first years made me think

I realised how didactic my style of teaching had become

(1st year and TY teacher, Bradfield College).

Declan altered his approach to teaching History to focus on discussion, interaction, students’ responses to visual stimuli, and minimising direct input from the teacher in the form of notes or explanation. Both the first-year and TY history students responded very positively to the changes introduced. Declan’s reflective diary traces the changes to his classroom practice.

I have to restrain myself from adopting the role of disciplinarian and jumping in to answer incorrect responses

They see it as valuable to have their answers recorded on the whiteboard and to be used as the basis for discussion

It has enlivened my own approach to classroom teaching and preparation as well as stimulating different ideas on how to best meet the needs of my students

The students now accept a significant element of voice in our lessons as a matter of fact

(History teacher's diary, Bradfield College).

Students' comments also recognised this changed approach and the positive impact on their experience in class. There was a real sense that the students were freed and reawakened by this new approach to teaching History that was evident in their comments.

I liked the increased student input as it encourages students to listen up and to tune in to what is being said rather than listening and note-taking for hours on end

(1st year History student, Bradfield College).

Great in-depth analysis proved most enjoyable, new teaching methods proved both novel and useful throughout

(TY History student, Bradfield College).

Declan had also recognised increased understanding and improved grades in both first-year and TY as a tangible outcome of student voice and of the changes it stimulated for both students and teacher. Arguably, as a senior teacher in the school, he had no difficulty in challenging the established discourse of pedagogy that positioned the student as largely passive and silent. The road less travelled was signposted by dialogic consultation towards sustained student-centred activity and the co-construction of the students' experience in history lessons.

These changes in practice and in teachers' perspectives on pedagogy, arising from student voice, can be viewed as a transformative experience for Declan in the context of practice, relationship and teacher identity. However, Cook-Sather (2007) identifies such changes, as 'translation' referring to changes that are less fundamental to practice and identity, but are clearly significant. Translation reflects change, in this case, in Declan's pedagogy that has built on previous experiences, yet is enacted within the same identifiable constructs of classroom, curriculum and examination. In essence, his previous practice has been translated within existing constructs.

Rudduck (2007) identifies significant change in students and teachers experiences in schools and classrooms based on partnership and collaboration, and a change in focus from the centrality of teachers' beliefs and authority to a focus on the students' experience. This represents translation in that the students' position changes from passive receiver to co-constructer of learning within the

classroom construct (Cook-Sather, 2007). Rudduck and Flutter (2000) also identify anticipated changes arising from student voice as ‘carving a new order of experience’ (*ibid.*, 2000, p. 75) in classrooms while Fielding (1999) identified a transformative student voice as ‘radical collegiality and dialogue’ (*ibid.*, 1999, p. 28). Arguably, Declan’s significant and recognised change can be placed within these frames as translation of the students’ experience of pedagogy in History and of his practice as a teacher. This translation, however, was manifest within class groups that were not overly influenced by the ‘backwash’ of examinations. The question of the sustainability of these practices, and of the teacher and student positioning remains to be established.

A sustained student voice?

Positive experiences emerged from engagement with student voice. Students identified respect, trust and positive relationships with their peers and teachers. The care from their teacher in their commitment to students’ well-being and in their professional pedagogical engagement with students’ learning and progress was also identified. Students recognised the changes introduced in their classroom and also expressed their outcome in terms of increased engagement, participation and enjoyment.

Teachers similarly identified increased participation and clear evidence of improved learning for students through engagement with student voice. Teachers shared the students’ feelings of improved relationships and trust but also identified the inclusion of marginalised and often silent students. The interaction between student voice, teacher authority, and the pressure of curriculum and examination challenged teachers and facilitated reflection on pedagogy and the students’ experience in the classroom. The question of whether these teachers would continue to afford their students a student voice of dialogic consultation leading to reflection and action remained.

Towards the end of the school year of this research all of the teachers had viewed student voice as a new element of their interaction with their students but not as anything that would significantly change their position or identity as a teacher. It was interesting that, at this point, most of the teachers framed student voice as an ‘idea’, a ‘strategy’, a ‘tool’ or a solution to problems that might emerge in class rather than viewing it as an ideological position. Nevertheless, their commentary on sustainability was positive though limited:

I think it’s fantastic. I’d be very for it as an idea
(2nd year CSPE teacher, St Anthony’s College).

I think this whole concept is very suitable for certain topics ...It is more of a strategy...I would describe it as probably an extra teaching tool
(TY Sport Science teacher, St Anthony’s College).

I will consult if I thought things were not going right but I have no definite plans to do it

(2nd year Geography teacher, Castlecourt College).

Each quotation reflected awareness, some positivity but no significant change in the views or positioning of these teachers relating to their sustained engagement with student voice. Any rights-based or democratic motivation was not visible as these comments simply represented teachers' awareness of the possible usefulness of student voice without any commitment to sustained change in their practice.

In addition, five of the teachers also viewed student voice as a realistic challenge to their pedagogical practice. Teachers spoke of different challenges, of the evolution of their teaching to include voice and of their confidence to engage with difference.

A new challenge for both teacher and student and we need to be prepared for a different challenge

(2nd year Science teacher, St Anthony's College).

I think teaching has to evolve as well...so that students do get more of a voice and that learning is more active and collaborative, I suppose

(2nd year Geography teacher, Castlecourt College).

I feel like saying to colleagues, try something different

(3rd year teacher, Castlecourt College).

While the comments point to an openness to change among all the teachers, sustained change and any evidence of transformation was voiced by just two of the teachers. Declan, teaching History in Bradfield, and Ita, teaching Mathematics and Geography in Castlecourt both reported that they had sustained the practice with their class groups following the intervention.

Conclusion

One year later

One year following the research period, the nine teachers in the case-study schools responded to an electronic questionnaire seeking their views and insights into their current practice relating to student voice. The teachers were asked to outline their understanding of student voice and to describe any sustained engagement with student voice in their classrooms since the research period.

Seven of the nine teachers interpreted the concept as engaging in consultation through dialogue and questionnaire with students within the relationship, context and culture of the classroom. These teachers interpreted student voice as 'consultation', 'participation in planning lessons' and

‘having a say’. However, just two teachers, the aforementioned Declan and Ita, made direct reference to on-going consultation and dialogue with students as part of their engagement with student voice in the period since the research was completed. Both teachers referenced a ‘real say’, and ‘a voice’ for their students.

In all classes, students are given the opportunity to state what methodologies / approaches they find most interesting / effective and, at the end of modules, to comment on what they thought worked and what could be improved in the teaching and learning which went on in the class...students feel more empowered by consultation and when they see they are having a real ‘say’ in what takes place in class.

(1st year and TY History teacher, Bradfield College).

Planning the curriculum in what has to be learned...when the students would like to do it, what semester, and what are the best learning tools for them...this creates a positive environment, it gives the student a ‘say’ a ‘voice’ and is a self-directed learning tool. It provides a challenge for my teaching

(2nd year Mathematics and 5th year Geography teacher, Castlecourt College).

The remaining seven teachers voiced the rhetoric of their student voice engagement from the research period. Exploration of their responses pointed to their increased inclusion of the voices of their students in pedagogy through discussion, co-operative learning and other interactions. They made no reference however, to further consultation or dialogue on their students experience in their classroom.

Declan and Ita had sustained their engagement with student voice through consultation and dialogue. Towards the end of the school year of the research, Ita had spoken of her students taking...‘ownership of their learning process’ and Declan spoke of his students accepting...‘a significant element of voice in our lessons as a matter of fact’.

In his response, one year after the study period, Declan wrote that ...‘students feel more empowered by consultation and they see that they are having a real ‘say’ in what takes place in class’. Similarly, Ita wrote of her discussions and consultations as...‘it gives the student a ‘say’ a ‘voice’ and is a self-directed learning tool. It provides a challenge for my teaching’. Their statements reflect sustained engagement and reflection, and on going action arising from student voice as an embedded aspect of pedagogy. The statements suggest an emancipatory and constructionist framing of student voice reflecting translation of the classroom relationship between student and teacher (Cook-Sather, 2007), a ‘new order of experience’ for students and teachers (Rudduck and Flutter, 2000) and a relationship of ‘radical collegiality’ and dialogue (Fielding, 1999, p. 28). Neither Declan nor Ita had returned to regressive pedagogy (Fielding, 2011) that limits and bounds the students’ experience. Their comments and experience awaken and liberate the possibilities for student voice and pedagogy within these realities.

Act III: Student voice and the student council

Introduction

THE STUDENT COUNCIL as a construct for student voice is viewed through three interconnected lenses. The council reflects a rights-based perspective in providing a voice for students arising from the UN Charter on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) following ratification in 1992. Using a second and related lens, the student council reflects prefigurative democracy in schools. The student council construct demands democratic practice including representative elections, inclusion and open access, communication and voice to facilitate commentary towards development, change and improvement. Through experience of a council, students are expected to experience democratic participation within their school lives (Alderson, 2000; O’Gorman, 1998). A third lens of analysis views the council as a construct for participative and active citizenship through these democratic practices (Cox and Robinson-Pant, 2006; Fielding 1973) and engagement in activities focused on society, community and the common good. Engagement with a student council can therefore be viewed as preparation and education in the experience of active citizenship and partnership (Klein, 2003; Rudduck, 2003).

The student council: a voice for all students?

Observation of a number of meetings and analysis of the interviews and reflection sheets of students and the interviews with the liaison teachers and principals, identified role, boundaries, and the functioning or engagement of the student council in Bradfield, Castlecourt and St Anthony’s as themes of analysis. These themes became frames within which the individual dynamic of each council was explored. These themes also allowed for an evaluation of the extent to which the student council reflected the overarching concepts of participation, partnership, right and democratic citizenship.

The council in context

All three case-study schools had an active and operational student council that had a term of office of one school year. A teacher, in the role of liaison teacher, and a written constitution supported the functioning of the council in each school. The councils in Bradfield and Castlecourt held democratic, representative class-group elections. A new council was re-elected annually. In St Anthony’s College, the formation of the council was based on applications from students that required endorsement by their assigned class teacher or tutor. Council members were not elected democratically and did not represent their individual class groups. However, council procedures,

by limiting the number of students from each year group who could become council members, attempted to ensure that all year groups had some members on the council and that no particular year group dominated.

Each council had an executive and officer roles including that of chairperson, referred to as president in Castlecourt College. In St Anthony's and Bradfield, the council members elected the executive members, while in Castlecourt a whole-school election for council representatives also included direct elections for officers to their executive roles. All students in Castlecourt could vote for the council executive. The elected chairperson in Castlecourt wore a ceremonial gown to represent students at significant school events such as open evenings or prize-giving ceremonies.

The routine of operation:

Central to the routine of each of the councils' on-going operations was a thirty to forty-minute meeting with class representatives at lunchtime during the school day. The frequency of these meetings varied. The council in St Anthony's and Castlecourt met once per week at lunchtime while the Bradfield council held a meeting every three or occasionally every four weeks. Frequency of meetings was an issue for the effectiveness of council activities as students in Castlecourt and St Anthony's reported that weekly meetings allowed for approximately twenty-five meetings in one school year. In Bradfield, meeting on the basis of every three weeks allowed for just eight to ten meetings per year. In each case, council procedures required the attendance of the liaison teacher for the meeting to go ahead. In all three schools, the role of liaison teacher formed part of a 'special duties' post of responsibility for which the teacher received an additional salary allowance related to the completion of these duties.

Meetings observed by the researcher took place in a classroom and were formally structured. Council meetings included elected class representatives, executive members and the liaison teacher. The meetings were closed to other students. The chairperson, secretary and other executive members sat facing the students; they opened the meeting and discussed the agenda. In St Anthony's, the agenda had been posted on the school's student council website in advance, while in both other cases the agenda was presented and discussed at the meeting. Minutes of the previous meetings were read out, discussed and agreed. The remaining period of the meetings observed concerned ordered discussion that was chaired in normal meeting style. The students, while often eating their lunches, largely engaged with the discussion; however, the level of intervention of the liaison teacher varied.

In St Anthony's the students were discussing and progressing a number of on-going issues including broadband access in the school for students and the preparation of a study guide for examination class groups. Dympna, the liaison teacher sat to the side of the classroom and did not intervene or interrupt but was invited to comment by the chairperson and did so without dominating or directing the discussion.

Lillian, the liaison teacher in Castlecourt, had a stronger input in meetings and either interrupted proceedings or was invited in by the chairperson. Inputs and comments were largely observed to be gently directive and controlling of the discussion. In all meetings observed in Castlecourt, the issues for discussion concerned the organisation of charity events or lunchtime sports activities for students. The intervention of the liaison teacher initially concerned the control and limitation of the scale and impact of the planned activities on students and teachers. In subsequent meetings, inputs from the liaison teacher and discussions were mainly concerned with the logistics of organising the events and seeking permission and the co-operation of teachers and the principal.

Stephen, the liaison teacher in Bradfield was a stronger presence in meetings. These meetings were overly formal with a three-person executive directing the meetings. The student representatives were largely silent during the meetings but Stephen regularly interrupted and directed the discussion. His interruptions articulated the views of school management and teachers on issues under discussion that included sports activities that required teacher supervision and the development of a 'student zone' on the school website, a project suggested to the student council by the school principal at their first meeting of the school year.

Meetings with the principal and reporting to the wider student body or to teachers were not formalised in any of the schools and operated on an *ad hoc* basis in each case. In Bradfield, the principal attended the first meeting of the council and, apart from specially convened meetings all other contact with the principal was channelled through Stephen, the liaison teacher. Students had direct access to the principal in St Anthony's and the executive was encouraged to seek meetings on a regular basis to make representations on specific issues and to report on progress. The principal was also invited to attend student council meetings although attendance was reported as infrequent. The chairperson of the council in Castlecourt had regular one-to-one meetings with the principal to seek permissions for specific projects and to report progress. In both Bradfield and Castlecourt, the liaison teacher acted as a filter for issues before sanctioning permission for a meeting with the principal, while Dympna in St Anthony's, to encourage the council executive to interact with the principal, did not report to the principal or liaise formally between the principal and the council. Dympna articulated this approach as a strategy to empower students to engage with school management as representatives of the students. St Anthony's and Castlecourt had a

student council notice board and website to communicate with students and council members, and to display notices and literature relating to student council activities and other student-related issues. Students in Bradfield reported back directly to their class groups as the main conduit of communication. All three councils spoke of the school newsletter, posters and school intercom system as regular conduits of communication between council and students.

The role of the student council

Clarity of role was significant for each council. Analysis of the policy discourse, as already outlined, provides a broad yet vague role for a student council in a school. The policy discourse overall points to students' 'involvement' in the 'affairs' of their schools', 'representing' students and working in 'partnership' with others to the 'benefit' of the school (Education Act, 1998; DES, 2002). Neither policy nor guidelines identify or outline explicit, specific, directed or expected roles for the council in a school. A range of roles was suggested for student councils in guideline documents when a school was planning their establishment (National Children's Office, 2006). The guiding words of these resource documents include 'listening', 'representing', 'consulting', 'providing information', 'communicating', and 'assisting' in relation to a range of aspects of school life (*ibid.*, p. 22). While guideline documents provide support of the establishment and operation of a council, no operational policy script is provided that is directive of the role, functioning and operation of a council in a school. In this vague policy context it is open to schools to interpret and develop a role for their council within the broad parameters as outlined in policy.

The guiding instrument: the constitution

All three councils had written constitutions based on guidance documentation and templates to support the development of student councils (National Children's Office, 2006). The constitutions provided a local written discourse within which each council operated. The form of the documents varied in their direction and detail.

St Anthony's outlined a broad and visionary role for the council written as a statement from the voice of the students.

We are the voice for students in the school...we represent the views of the students and work with the principal, the teachers and the parents' association in order to improve student life in the school

(Student Council, St Anthony's College).

The discourse arising from the document reflected student voice as having a say and of being consulted at school level, reflecting the national policy discourse of partnership, involvement in the affairs of the school and using the term ‘work with’ to represent a partnership process.

Bradfield College had developed a narrower constitution in the form of a bulleted list also referencing partnership in the context of ‘work with’ but the role was specified narrowly as we:

*Work with school management on relevant school policies’, to meet regularly
with the principal, fundraising and to help out at official school functions*
(Student Council, Bradfield College).

The Bradfield constitution was directive towards a distinct consultative role in relation to ‘relevant school policies’ and towards narrow duties referencing fundraising and ‘helping out’ at official school events. The constitution also outlined areas that could not be discussed by the student council. ‘Uncomplimentary’ references to individuals, any mention or discussions of grievances between students and their teachers, and any disciplinary matters were specifically excluded. Elected members were required to sign a contract document pledging that they would attend meetings, represent their class, support the council and abide by the code of conduct of the school.

Castlecourt students were also required to sign a contract following their election. Their constitution lacked any statement of role or purpose, and was focused in detail on election procedures and on protocols for meetings. It did outline the role of the liaison teacher as acting as a...‘link between staff and pupils’ and such as having ‘a voice but not a vote’. Similar exclusion clauses were also included as ‘any uncomplimentary mention of staff, management or pupil by name or implication...individual grievances...or...on-going disciplinary matters’.

These constitutional documents reflected an established discourse of power in these schools in that they place significant boundaries around the operation and role of the council. The rhetoric of the documents defines practice but varied significantly in tone and in procedural outline. St Anthony’s presented an aspirational and visionary outline of partnership, representation and improvement without conditionality or exclusions. Bradfield’s council was particularly circumscribed by its limited role, as outlined, and by the specific exclusions and, while the constitution for Castlecourt focused mainly on the democratic procedures for elections, the voice of the students was also limited by exclusions.

Student voices on role

Students from St Anthony's College voiced a role for their council that reflected the policy discourse based on representation and advocacy for change and improvement. Their view on their role was also reflected in the dominant activities that the council engaged in.

A way for students to have a voice in the school so that they can get changes they feel they need, it also has a role in improving the school for future students to improve their school lives

(Student Council member, St Anthony's College).

The student council is an:

Expression of the students' voice and also a means to do charity work, do various work beneficial to students, and as an intermediary between staff and students

(Student Council member, St Anthony's College).

St Anthony's students stressed a representative and advocacy role for the council to voice for change. The constitution's emphasis on partnership was not evident in any of the students' comments. In fact, the distance between students and teachers was more evident in the notion of negotiation as reflected a role for the council as 'an intermediary between staff and students'.

In discussing their council, the students in St Anthony's identified and differentiated between two distinct roles. They saw themselves as event organisers citing a school-wide quiz and extensive fundraising. The students also identified their role as advocates and representatives for students and their views, by interacting with school management to provide improved facilities for students in relation to food and seating arrangements. The role articulated, although dominated by event organisation, reflected that presented by student council guideline documents (DES, 2002; National Children's Office, 2006). The students also clearly recognised their success in the provision of improved seating, a relaxation of mobile phone rules and changes to the food available for students.

In discussion, the students also identified a policy consultation role for the council that was ongoing during the research period. The school principal had invited the council chairperson to sit on a policy review committee with teachers and parents to review all school policies. Students did not immediately identify this aspect of the council role, yet, this role reflected partnership and consultation in reviewing all policies, not just those identified as 'relevant' as in the case of Bradfield College.

At the moment they are doing a review on all the policies and they have actually asked that they have a member of the student council there for all the reviews

(Student Council chairperson, St Anthony's College).

Viewed from the perspective of a role in decision-making in the school that is cited as an aspiration for student councils, this involvement was significant, though it involved only the chairperson and was not cited significantly as an aspect of role by the other students.

Bradfield students identified an active role for their council in representing students and in advocating and communicating with school management on behalf of students. The students saw the council as a forum for discussion, to hear the views of students and to act on their behalf. Students spoke of the council's role as forum:

To share and consider ideas...to improve school...to get some things done that the class asked you to do...raising issues, voicing concerns and making suggestions...advocating the students' ideas in the running of the school and sorting out students problems

(Student Council members, Bradfield College).

The students' articulation of their role was infused with action, and similar to St Anthony's had a tone of challenge. The students' voices envisioned the council through its representative structure as empowering students towards change and involvement in decision-making. The students spoke of the council facilitating them to:

Have a say in how to run the school, to... 'improve conditions for students and to...campaign on behalf of students

(Student Council members, Bradfield College).

Similarly, the language of the students was infused with the terminology of industrial relations. While students viewed the role as campaigning, the chairperson spoke of negotiation with management and the authority of the council to do so. The council:

Communicates for students but unlike students we have the authority to bring up and negotiate ideas with management

(Chairperson, Student Council, Bradfield College).

In parallel with the rhetoric of challenge, campaign and change, the council members as class representatives saw their role as one of representation and advocacy for the classes they represented. A young first-year class representative saw empowerment in the context of the council as:

I get an opinion even though I am only a first year

If they tell you something you can say it at the council meeting

(Student Council members, Bradfield College).

The class representatives spoke of suggesting a new idea for a local inter-schools sports tournament and saw the council as the body that 'speaks on behalf of students' in seeking permission for such an activity.

The student council in Castlecourt had a very strong focus on organising activities for students and fundraising for a chosen charity. The students' view of the role of the council combined this emphasis with an advocacy and representative role to voice students' issues and concerns. The student council was viewed as:

A voice for students inside the school...to raise awareness on issues in school and issues for charity...it is also important that the student council creates some fun for the students by organising events - talent show - leg wax, and cake sale

(Student council member, Castlecourt College).

The students also articulated a role as a forum for discussion and communication.

I see the student council as a means of communication between students and the school as a whole. It is where students can voice ideas or problems and is a place to discuss them

(Student council member, Castlecourt College).

Elections had significance for the Castlecourt student council in that, as outlined, all positions on the council were filled through an annual election. The students also highlighted a representative role for the council that was empowered by the elected class representatives.

I do think the council has a voice for students as for each class we have a rep and we have a student suggestion box

(Student council member, Castlecourt College).

Each class has a rep, which acts as a voice for students in the school

(Student council member, Castlecourt College).

In exploring this representative role with the students it was evident that the students were elected as representatives of their class but that their role was to contribute to discussion and to generate ideas within the council and was not specifically to voice issues from their class group. One first-year class representative expressed his experience as contributing to the organising of the fundraising events.

I was only a class rep, we came up with ideas to fundraise

(Student council member, Castlecourt College).

Just one voice of challenge emerged in the discussion of the council's role in Castlecourt. A fifth-year student identified with the council's representative and advocacy role but was frustrated by the perception of having a voice that is not always listened to.

I believe that the council should act as a voice of the students but often the council is not being listened to enough. I think that the council should be important, as that is the only way students can be heard for their opinion

(Student council member, Castlecourt College).

In the context of role, students' perception in all three councils reflected the policy discourse in its rhetoric and intention. Students articulated a role of a student council that spanned representation and advocacy on behalf of students with school management, a forum for discussion of issues that concern students, and event organisation and management for charity fundraising and for the benefit of students. Events emerged as a dominant aspect of role, and while students were aware, in two cases, of their election as representatives, this democratic and representative role seemed under developed reflecting the findings and critique of Alderson (2000), O'Gorman, (1998) and Rudduck, (2003). Bradfield was the only constitution that set out a fundraising role for the council, while all three engaged extensively in these activities. The students in all three councils spoke at length about voice and of both being and representing a voice for students. Their view of their role outlined an experience of prefigurative democracy reflecting Cox and Robinson-Pant, (2006), Fielding, (1973) and Mannion, (2007).

Nevertheless, apart for the involvement of St Anthony's student council in a policy review subcommittee, the students did not articulate any other engagement that could be interpreted as a role in decision-making.

Teacher and principal voices

The council in each of the schools interacted with and was guided or managed by a liaison teacher appointed by the principal. Both principal and the liaison teacher influenced the extent of the role of the council, its activities, its influence on decision-making and its power to engage in 'the affairs of the school' (Education Act, 1998, 27:3). The voices of all three agents, students, liaison teacher and principal, allowed for an understanding of the complexity or contradictions that the student council, as a construct for student voice, created and presented in each of these schools.

St Anthony's College

They have a say and the decision is made

(Principal, St Anthony's College).

Dympna, the liaison teacher assigned to the council in St Anthony's described multiple roles for the council that reflected those that could be gleaned from the students' comments. Dympna stressed the role of the council as a forum for the students' involvement in decision-making and also their role as fundraisers.

The first thing anyway that it is a forum where the students themselves have a voice. Where the students themselves feel they are involved in the organisation and running of the school. Where they feel that they are making decisions about their lives in school and they really are because there is great support for that.

So that's one thing with it. And then the other thing is that they are involved in raising money for charitable events and fundraising as well

(Liaison teacher, St Anthony's College).

It is significant to note that though 'feeling' involved in decision-making and 'feeling' an involvement in the 'organisation and running of the school' were expressed as roles by the teacher yet students 'are' involved in fundraising. A feeling of involvement, and a forum for student voice were arguably some distance from actual involvement in decision-making, however the tone of the statements reflected the promotion of a role for the student council as a democratic representative body positioned as a construct for students' involvement in the affairs of the school.

A further sense of promotion of the role was reflected in the level to which the principal initiates consultation with the council.

The student council have been involved in very important issues in the school...the principal has consulted them quite a bit on different issues like changing things in the school

(Liaison teacher, St Anthony's College).

The liaison teacher made reference to consultation on a review of the code of behaviour, on a new school jacket, and on improving seating areas for senior students. The depth of these involvements beyond a 'feeling' will be further explored within the actual work of the council in the school.

Students, teacher and school principal shared a similar vision for the role of the student council in St Anthony's. The principal did not articulate a role for the council in event organisation but identified, in significant detail, how the council's role in advocacy, policy development and review was valued. The council represented:

The student link with the whole organisation of the school...very much like advocates of the student body in the sense that when there are difficulties that they would represent those difficulties to people within management

(Principal, St Anthony's College).

'Difficulties' were identified as issues relating to facilities, activities and procedures, but were not issues relating to fundamental and established routines, rules or practices. The principal envisioned advocacy as a 'shopping list'.

On an on-going basis they come with a shopping list each year of areas that they feel should be addressed in terms of maybe the management of the ancillary services within the school, defects in the infrastructure and so on, that are impacting on their lives

(Principal, St Anthony's College).

The principal, in responding to the students' requests reflected how he valued this advocacy role in the context of the school facilities.

We actually respond fairly systematically because I feel that at the next meeting with them I have to tick off and have to show that we have addressed these issues

(Principal, St Anthony's College).

Other approaches from students were also described in relation to more fundamental issues relating to rules, an adjustment to the school uniform and sanctions relating to misuse of mobile phones in school. In these cases, the principal described listening to the students and facilitating them to have their say and to contribute to the discussion. School management then made these decisions. In these cases, it is noteworthy that although the students took the agentive role in addressing these issues to the principal, power positions and roles were maintained. This cannot be viewed as consultation but rather as students making a case to the principal on specific procedural issues. The decision-making power and authority remained with the principal.

They make representations, we try to arrive at a consensus, they have a say and the decision is made

(Principal, St Anthony's College).

Consultation with the council was also described by the principal as routine in relation to policy development and review. Reflecting the very limited reference made by the students to this role, the principal questioned the importance placed on this aspect of their role as perceived by the council members themselves.

They actually have an input into policy documents and the review and so on, that's there, but whether or not, from their point of view, it is as meaningful as the more day to day issues is a moot point you know, I'm not too sure

(Principal, St Anthony's College).

In the articulation of role for the student council in St Anthony's, it is the principal who provided the greatest depth and insight into the place of the council in terms on involvement in the 'affairs of the school' and in decision-making processes. While not mentioning the students' role in event organisation and fundraising, the principal valued the students' role in policy and in advocacy, and recognised their agency in making representations for changes in established rules and procedures. However, the views of the students and Dympna centred more on the council as a forum for discussion, action in effecting improvement and in fundraising and event organisation.

Bradfield College:

It's stage-managed in such a way that we make it look like they are in control

(Liaison teacher, Bradfield College).

Stephen's vision, as liaison teacher, for the role of the student council reflected the rhetoric of the constitution, the policy discourse and the commentary of the students in placing the council as an elected forum to represent the views of students to school management. Stephen described routine discussion of issues that students reported from their class groups, some initiatives to address these, and fundraising charity projects particularly at Christmas and for specific disaster relief projects. His description of the role played by the council changed significantly when asked about his role within these projects. He stated directly that the council was 'stage managed' as 'a contrivance' to give students a sense of empowerment within the construct but at a level of meaningless tokenism reflecting Cox and Robinson-Pant, (2006), McGrath, (1971) and Wyness, (2005). The students could not be trusted with a meaningful and agentive student council.

In the interview extract below, Stephen articulates his view of the reality of the role of the council in Bradfield.

Interviewer: *So, is it your view so that you need to manage and control the student council or that you just need to stand back and make sure that it runs?*

Stephen: *I would say the way it runs in this school is very stage-managed. I think if you don't have it managed, I think there is a danger of the student council being used as a forum for disgruntled students, students with issues and so on.*

Interviewer: *So how is it stage-managed?*

Stephen: *It's stage-managed [the student council] in such a way that we make it look like they are in control. They are listened to and we make it look like we do things for them but at the end of the day its all a contrivance*

Interviewer: *And why? Why contrive it?*

Stephen: *Why contrive it? I think it's trust. I think there are, in all schools, basic issues of trust between the teachers, the management and the students, and I think it just isn't there fully enough to give them the full rein*

(Liaison teacher, Bradfield College).

Any meaningful role in prefigurative democracy or as a forum to encourage and develop a voice for students that reflected the idealism articulated by the students at one level, and the agency in their language in reference to negotiation and campaigning on issues to improve the school at another level, was undermined by Stephen's view of the role of the council. The reality, from the perspective of the liaison teacher, was that these roles were not only tokenistic but also actually false and contrived reflecting Cox and Robinson-Pant, (2006) and McGrath, (1971). He spoke of a controlled pretence of student empowerment, of listening rather than dialogue within a culture of control. The elected representatives were disempowered and controlled based on an absence of trust within this contrivance reflecting Wyness, (2005). These actions were in direct contrast to the 'working with' philosophy of the council's constitution.

The strategy for the stage-management was to limit the role of the council and the freedom of the students to voice their concerns within the council's role as a forum. Indeed, the infrequent meeting of the council reflected this. Stephen and school management did not trust the students and feared that the freedom of a forum would allow students to voice complaints and therefore, the student council, in his view, could become 'a forum for disgruntled students, and students with issues'. Control of the council seemed an imperative (Wyness, 2005; Wyse 2001). Stephen's concern to control the council agenda and maintain his authority over the operation of the council also reflected his level of intrusion in council discussions during meetings and arguably, the infrequency of meetings which would militate against any depth of engagement in issues that might be perceived as a challenge to power in Bradfield.

In contrast to Stephen's account of the role of the student council, the principal of Bradfield presented a role that reflected that of the students, the constitution and wider policy discourse. The principal described a forum for student voice to facilitate the communication of 'ideas', 'views' and 'suggestions' to school management. This account did not include any reference to negotiation or campaigning by the students for change. It stressed communication of ideas from a forum of discussion.

The role of the student council is essentially the student voice in the school and I suppose its primary function is to let us know the views of students and it's a forum for students to offer ideas and suggestions and any views they may have on how to enhance or improve the school in terms of policies that directly affect students or activities perhaps that students are involved in. So I suppose primarily it really is the student voice in the school

(Principal, Bradfield College).

The principal's account also made reference to the freedom of the council as a forum to set and manage its own agenda without the control of Stephen. Both descriptions ran counter to Stephen's statement of contrivance, stage-management and control.

Allow the students the forum themselves and allow them to set the agenda in terms of what they feel is relevant to discuss and so forth, as opposed to the teacher guiding every meeting and so forth. It's really the students' meeting

(Principal, Bradfield College).

Policy consultation was also referred to in the description of role. This was described as an occasional event and was not central to the role.

We always try to consult with student council...if there is ever a policy or perhaps an area that is of importance in areas of policy, the student council will always be consulted

(Principal, Bradfield College).

The role of the council in fundraising and assisting at school events, as outlined in the constitution, was not mentioned by the principal in the discussion of role.

Descriptions of the role of the student council from each of the three actors in the drama differed in emphasis. The students focused on representation and discussion with a view to achieving change for students. The principal articulated a vision of partnership and consultation that would facilitate the communication of students' views to management, while the liaison teacher undermined any meaningful role for the council in his description of the council as a stage-managed contrivance of consultation and voice.

Castlecourt College

They certainly have a voice

(Principal, Castlecourt College).

The whole school election process in Castlecourt provided a high profile for the student council in the school and the backdrop for the council as a representative democratic forum for students. Lillian, the liaison teacher, identified the election as the key event in the establishment and visibility of the council in the school and cited significant interest from students.

The elections are democratic, nominations are required for officers, president and vice president, officers for sports and charities and PRO...in the last few years there has been a lot of interest, eight or nine students for each position

(Liaison teacher, Castlecourt College).

Arising from the significance of the election, Lillian identified the primary role for the council as a representative body for the students based on partnership. This reflected the students' view of the role but Lillian also highlighted a policy consultation and ratification role that the students did not mention.

The students in the council are representative of the student body, because of the need for partnership in education they have a voice, they have a role in policy making, they have to see policies and ratify them as well as the teachers and the board of management

(Liaison teacher, Castlecourt College).

A ceremonial role for the council was also cited by Lillian that was not mentioned by the students, while the role in event organising and fundraising, so strong in the students' experience of their role was given just passing mention. The students' representative role was viewed in the context of ideas and ownership of fundraising projects.

Representing the student population...so maybe if they come up with ideas say for fundraising then it's their idea

(Liaison teacher, Castlecourt College).

Their ceremonial role was seen in the context of interacting with parents as representatives of the student body.

On open night or prize giving they would guide parents around

(Liaison teacher, Castlecourt College).

Lillian's articulation of the council's role as one of representation and partnership ran counter to that of the students who emphasised event management and fundraising as well as communication and addressing issues and problems to school management. Examples, cited by Lillian, of these representations were not immediate or high level and as with the other councils concerned school infrastructure.

Over the years they have brought up issues like the benches in the canteen and the taps in the toilets were not working

(Liaison teacher, Castlecourt College).

It was Lillian's interpretation of the role of the student representatives that provided a further insight into her view of the role of the council.

To attend the meetings, to inform the class of what is going on, of what activities will be going on like soccer leagues, the open night or maybe a cake sale to raise funds for charity

(Liaison teacher, Castlecourt College).

Policy ratification, outlined as a key role by Lillian, was described as low-key process, very occasional and initiated by the principal. While the process seemed detailed, according to Lillian, a review and comment on a policy took place and was completed... 'at one meeting'.

The principal would come to me to ask that a policy, say a homework policy needs to be ratified, I would photocopy it and distribute it in a meeting, they are asked to read it, to comment on it, the president will communicate these to the principal and suggest changes if there are changes or else they all agree and it is ratified

(Liaison teacher, Castlecourt College).

In contrast to Bradfield, these comments are recorded and communicated by a student, in this case, to the principal.

The principal of Castlecourt spoke of the role of the student council in broad generalities relating to voice, but without specifics. Reference to students speaking and representing students 'with authority' and a formal ceremonial role were mentioned. Specific issues relating to their voice and issues to be listened to were not elaborated upon.

They certainly have a voice, they have a good voice, we are very much prepared to listen to them and we want to hear from them

(Principal, Castlecourt College).

It has a formal role, it is formally elected and can speak with authority on behalf of the students, and it represents students at functions, the award ceremony or a visiting dignitary...the student council has a gown, it's a formal

a thing and they wear it on ceremonial occasions, it gives the students a status within the school as well

(Principal, Castlecourt College).

Interestingly, a representative role, although hinted at in the context of the election and speaking with authority, was not highlighted. The councils' role in policy ratification and in event organisation was also omitted from this description of role. The vagueness of references to councils' representations to school management reflected the comments of the liaison teacher, and was not viewed as a key role for the council.

Over the years there have been some things like the state of the toilets, which was fair enough and was acted upon straight away

(Principal, Castlecourt College).

The accounts of role as articulated in Castlecourt shared the unifying theme of voice for students. However, although the elected and whole-school representative nature of the council was significant in Castlecourt its role and power was not universally reflected in the voices of the students, liaison teacher or the principal. Elements of the role, as articulated, included a forum for discussion with students, representations to school management for change, policy consultation, policy ratification and a ceremonial role at specific school activities. None of the three parties to the council seemed to share a common script for these roles.

Summary of voices on role

In summary, a discourse emerged on the role of the council in each school that reflected concordance and discordance on the construct as a whole-school voice for students. The interpretation of that role varied between the different agents. The overall role reflected the vagueness of the policy script but was interpreted with individual emphasis in each school. Structures that reflected Foucault's dividing practices relating to selection of students, frequency of meetings, an assigned liaison teacher and channels of communication, while in place, also varied between the schools and limited the operation of the councils.

Students seemed to have accepted and internalised the normalised discourse that was embedded by practice and the power of the principal and the liaison teacher and were largely uncritical of the operation of the councils in their schools. They articulated an idealised and visionary role for the council as a representative forum for discussion, an expression of student voice and a platform to address concerns with school management. The roles of event management and fundraising were not widely articulated by the students but were a concern for some. A consultative role in relation to school policy development, comment and ratification did not feature strongly in the students'

interpretation of role. The forum and resulting representative and advocacy roles with school management most strongly reflected the students' view of the council.

The liaison teachers' view reflected that of the students but was focused on the reality of action and operation. While the council was viewed as a forum for voice, advocacy and action, their view of engagement largely reflected either improvement to services, changes to the physical environment, or the organisation of events, normally to raise funds for charity. Voice was mainly viewed as communication with the principal or with the student body as the basis of advocacy or event management, but not as having a say in decision-making. The reality of the students' involvement in policy comment and review was described as brief, rapid and tokenistic reflecting Cox and Robinson-Pant (2006), Keogh and Whyte, (2005), McCowan, (2010), McLoughlin, (2004) and OMCYA, (2011).

Principals' views, and their engagements with the council also varied but were unified around a discourse of power and control thinly disguised in a rhetoric relating to the construct as representing the voice of students. No principal mentioned the event and fundraising focus of the council while policy consultation was presented as a significant role. Advocacy was viewed in terms of improvements or changes to facilities as referenced by Keogh and Whyte, (2005), while only one principal made specific reference to students raising issues that could potentially affect established power and authority of the teachers and school management.

All the agents envisioned student voice in the context of a student council construct as communication rather than consultation or co-construction: communication through a representative and seemingly democratic structure on issues that concerned students; communication of issues to the principal relating to practical matters of students' experience of school life like food, uniform and specific rules; communication to the principal relating to the organisation of events and fundraising activities; and communication to students on promotion and arrangement of these activities.

A role for the student council as a consultative construct representing the voice of students in having a say on issues that affect them emerged only in the principals' references relating to school policy. One school had invited the council chairperson to sit on a policy review committee that represented both consultation and co-construction in decision-making within a representative democratic structure that included parents and teachers. In the other schools descriptions of this role were largely tokenistic and lacked meaningful engagement. In all cases, this activity was not identified by the students but featured strongly in the principals' discussion of role. Interestingly, none of adult voices articulated any view of the council as representing engagement in

prefigurative democratic practice, active citizenship or linking in any way to the school curriculum (Mannion, 2007), features that are strongly critiqued as aspirations for the role of a student council in UK schools (Alderson, 2000; Chapman, 1970b; Fielding, 2010; Taylor, 2002; Wyse, 2001).

The role as outlined by these voices, it is argued, can be interpreted as largely tokenistic and without agency in relation to a voice in decision-making. The role, while established and presented as democratic, is controlled within established and encultured views of authority and control (Keogh and Whyte, 2005; McLoughlin, 2004). The students seemed to have accepted a discourse relating to the council that visualised a forum for student voice within the institution. However, Foucault's concept of discontinuity between rhetoric and action saw the actual role as focused on event organisation rather than addressing issues for students beyond improved physical environment or facilities. The students largely believed in their articulated vision of their role as agentive elected student representatives. Evidence of a partnership role with management in decision-making that emerged from this envisioning is difficult to find. A finding echoed by Alderson, (2000), Huddleston, (2007), Taylor, (2002), Wyse, (2001). The students appeared to believe the rhetoric of voice and representation without the lived experience of that role. The rhetoric, arguably embedded by the power and authority of school management and the liaison teacher, reflected inclusion, democratic practice and openness within school culture. Such expressions made students feel that they have the power through the council to effect change. The reality of role and power, already challenged by Stephen's discourse of discontinuity, was indeed illustrated by the lack of power and depth of the engagements of these councils during their short terms of office.

Student Council as enacted during one school year

The actual engagements and activities of the student council as described by the students centred on particular issues of concern in their schools, and more generally relating to events and charity activities and some developments of the schools infrastructure.

In Bradfield, the principal had asked the students to examine how the schools' computer network could be used to assist students in their study and preparation for examinations. The chairperson took on this project and with the secretary designed a questionnaire that was distributed to students. The students were asked if a section of the school website would be useful for access to subject-specific study materials provided by teachers. Following analysis of the responses, a very positive reaction from the student body was identified. By the end of the school year, the project had stalled at the point of analysis of the survey findings as the council had met on just seven occasions.

Days lost due to school closure during bad weather and pressure of examinations was cited as reasons for delay. At the end of the school year, the council was dissolved and new elections were planned for the following first term of the next school year. The students' commentary identified the project and the slow pace of the initiative towards the end of the school year.

The idea was developed by our chairperson and discussed at the next meeting. The council is currently reading surveys and is nearly at the stage of starting to create an actual section on the website. I would like it to be on the Internet on a revised school website

Attempting to develop/redevelop schools website. Our chairman put forward the idea, after consultation with the council we decided to create a survey asking students for their ideas on the project. Still waiting for the surveys to be read and the information to be presented to the council

(Student Council members, Bradfield College).

Initiatives reflecting an advocacy and representative role concerned specific issues of facilities and organisation that were identified by the students. The council members recounted three specific actions undertaken following representations or from their own experiences as students. These concerned coat hangers, a locked gate and adjustments to the examination timetable.

One of the big problems was that there were no coat hangers and through the council there was coat hangers put in

(Student Council member, Bradfield College).

The council achieved the unlocking of a gate to allow students retrieve their football.

There was a gate in our play area I suppose that was always unlocked last year but for some reason it was locked this year and that meant that whenever people were playing soccer if the ball went out there they had to climb over a wall and the gate to get the ball back. So just a simple thing like getting the gate unlocked again

(Student Council member, Bradfield College).

The student council also achieved what they described as a small 'feedback' input into the adjustment of the examination schedule, which they identified as a success.

We had to go to management recently about our timetables for the 'pre exams' and we had a small bit of feedback into what was happening with that

(Student Council member, Bradfield College).

Throughout their term of office consisting of one school year, the St Anthony's student council had organised a number of events and had addressed issues of school maintenance with the principal. The students regularly compiled lists of maintenance issues that are given to the principal at the meeting, outlined in his commentary as a 'shopping list' to be ticked off on completion.

We gave him a maintenance report and he said he was going to talk to the caretakers... we needed mirrors in the bathrooms and we found out today that they have been put in. All the locks on the doors weren't working and we said that to him and they have all been fixed

(Student Council member, St Anthony's College).

The students also described big school events that they organised and advertised on the student council notice board and on their own website.

We have events like the monster quiz and we had the raffle for Haiti... a project we were thinking of doing in the future is a teachers versus students debate in aid of charity

(Student Council member, St Anthony's College).

The students, in search of projects other than events, had also progressed the idea of a study booklet for students or an insert on study skills for inclusion in their student homework journal. This project was in development during the research period and involved consultation with students through a survey. The survey, seeking ideas from students, did not provide any viable options to the council and therefore they progressed an idea from one of their members. The project consisted of:

A booklet...a guide that students could use when studying because a lot of the time people do get distracted in studying and a thing that would actually help them make a difference with their studying and hopefully better their results

We went through a lot of processes really of kind of discussing it as a group and then going out to the students with a survey but then to be honest none of them really brought back anything so we had a few kind of ideas in house and then we chose what we thought would be the most vital

We are going to go talk to certain teachers, an English teacher, an Irish teacher and a Maths teacher and we are going to consult them and then we are going to decide how the booklet will be broken up and putting it to each teacher if they would like to get involved

(Student Council members, St Anthony's College).

This project was progressed by a sub-committee of the council during the school year to the stage of consulting with identified teachers. The group reported to the full council meeting throughout the year.

Castlecourt students did not progress a specific project during the year but continued with their charity, fundraising and sports activities and assistance with school events. Students spoke of the achievements of previous councils in the context of raising money 'to buy defibrillators for the school' and achievements in relation to timetable and the food available in the school canteen.

Lunch times have been lengthened by five minutes and the school day was shortened which makes a difference for students - healthy food options were

brought to the school canteen. Numerous volunteers were sent abroad to work with people in need

(Student Council member, Castlecourt College).

In the school year of this research the students organised charity fund raising events and sports competitions for students. The students selected a particular charity to support that became the focus of their fundraising activities. Permission from the liaison teacher and the principal was granted for a number of events that were discussed and decided at council meetings.

Everyone came up with ideas on how to raise money - I was a class rep

The principal gave us permission for head shaves, leg waxing, but he stopped us from doing a no uniform day because it caused a problem

We raised money for the Hope foundation. Sports officers organised lunch time soccer and hurling for first years and second years

Leg waxing and cake sales - I was involved in raising the money and going around to classes to raise awareness that this is happening - biggest achievement has been raising money for the Hope foundation - some travelled to Calcutta to see where the money was spent

Fundraising - fair trade chocolate bars

(Student Council members, Castlecourt College).

Meetings of the council that were observed were dominated with the logistical arrangements for these events and the elected class representatives were mainly concerned with seeking the support of their class to participate or contribute to these events.

Role and action

A clear contrast between the role of the council as envisaged by the students and school principals and that reflected by their activities emerged for this analysis of the work of the three councils over the school year of this research. Students aspired towards a role of dialogue, consultation and representation but expressions of these roles were not dominant in their lived experience of the council in that school year. Principals also spoke of representative voice and the council as a forum for voice but did not identify a role as either reflecting prefigurative democracy and active citizenship or events and projects as a central expression of that role. Advocacy and representation reflected addressing issues to the school principal relating to conditions and facilities that could be improved and corrected. Apart from one reference by St Anthony's students, the councils made no reference to a role in consultation on policy review or ratification during the school year. The dominant activity for the councils was either a specific project as in the case of Bradfield, a combination of work on a specific project, advocacy and event organisation as in St Anthony's, or an almost complete focus on charity fundraising as evident in Castlecourt.

The principals' vision and outline of role for each school largely reflected this contrast when set against the actual activities of the council during the school year. It is arguable that principals outline of role reflected the policy script of the Education Act (1998) and National Children's Strategy (2000) in outlining a representative and consultative role and voice for students in school affairs. Equally, their envisioning and expression of that role and voice goes beyond the vagueness of the wider policy script in providing a broad aspirational rhetoric relating to student voice and students having the facility to have a say in 'matters affecting the child' (UNCRC, 1992) in their school. Central to this argument is participation as tokenism reflecting similar arguments across student voice discourse (Alderson, 2000; Keogh and Whyte, 2005; McCowan, 2010; Rudduck and Flutter, 2000; Taylor, 2002; Whitty and Wisby, 2007; Wyse, 2001). Principals, with the approval of the board of management and through the direction of the liaison teacher, facilitated the establishment of a student council based on representative democracy. However, having established the council they then ensured, through the expression and enactment of a Foucauldian power knowledge discourse, that the council, although active was controlled and limited in its role as forum and voice for consultation and the articulation of students' views reflecting Wyness, (2005), and Wyse, (2001). The discontinuity in discourse of the council that at one level positioned students as empowered by the visibility of their elected position, was then channelled into participation and organisation of public events in school. A role in school decision-making was articulated as a function of the council, however, the reality of this role was one of empowering a group of students to engage in positive, sustainable and developmental projects and in communication with the school principal on issues within the school that concern students. The combined power of the principal and liaison teacher ensured that the council is clearly distanced in all cases whether directly or subtly from a meaningful role in decision-making (Cox and Robinson-Pant, 2006). Foucauldian power and authority structures in both policy and practice limit students' roles in key decisions to those areas deemed appropriate by school authorities (Keogh and Whyte, 2005; McLoughlin, 2004). Arguably the construct of the council, in its semblance of student empowerment and democracy echoing Arnot, McIntyre, Pedder and Reay, (2004) and Fielding, (2001a) is created to channel student voice and therefore provides a construct that facilitates its effective control.

Boundaries and controls - three insightful events

In engaging with the voices of the players in the student council dramas that unfolded across the school year, three particular incidents gave an insight into how the often hidden discourse of power in the school ran counter to the expressed discourse of the student council as representative, consultative and advocate for student voice.

In St Anthony's, the student executive members who were senior-cycle students described interaction, engagement and the expectations of new first-year students at council meetings.

You have one or two first years who are a bit intent on trying to change the world...they don't really know the run of the school very well. They think being on the student council that they can do all these things. But we know from being here long enough what can and can't be done

(Student council member, St Anthony's College).

The comment of the senior student points to an established and embedded culture of control, expectation and limitation on what the council could achieve. The 'run of the school' can be seen to represent socialisation into ways of doing, routines and roles. 'What can and can't be done' represented the lived reality of the role of council as it emerged within the established boundaries and controls. Rather than changing the world, over time the students learned what was acceptable within the boundaries.

A second issue, the placing of a student council suggestion box on the wall in Castlecourt triggered another drama reflecting control and subtle limitation of the power of the council. In the context of discussing her perceived role of guidance to the student council executive Lillian mentioned the appearance of a suggestion box on the corridor.

A teacher told me there was a suggestion box, I didn't know anything about it, now I spoke to the president and said no doubt it would be fine but you have to let me know if you are doing anything

(Student council liaison teacher, Castlecourt College).

The suggestion box symbolised power as communication with the student body in the context of advocacy and representation, which, while an aspiration, was not a major engagement of the current council in Castlecourt. The insistence on prior knowledge, implying permission, reflected the power and control agenda that the liaison teachers represented. The need to further control the agenda again emerged as the interview progressed relating to the role of the president.

Sometimes the president gets a bit too much, they think that they can do this and that and everything so you just have to pull them back a bit. They start planning things and they would not let you know or organising things and not letting management know, and when I would suggest things they might have their own agenda and would not listen to anyone else on the council and not include the other officers

(Student council liaison teacher, Castlecourt College).

The liaison teacher was insistent on communication, clearance and permission. While communication was essential in the operation of the council, the liaison teacher arguably revealed the extent to which a president was required to conform to established discourse of boundaries and procedures, and the levels of control reflecting Wyness, (2005) and Wyse (2001) and management that was exerted to... 'pull them back a bit'.

A third drama simply reflected the admission of Stephen, the liaison teacher in Bradfield, that policy consultation was purely a tokenistic engagement for the student council. He had already described the student council construct as a stage-managed contrivance to give student a voice in the school. His account of the policy consultation process further supported that contention. Stephen is asked about the formality or otherwise of this role for the council as outlined by the principal.

Interviewer: *Is that a formal consultation process around policies or is it more informal?*

Stephen: *Oh I would say it's informal. In other words I wouldn't write down what they say.*

Interviewer: *How would it happen?*

Stephen: *Well, you know, the principal might say to me, right, would you run this by the student council. It might be a policy. It might be something new that's changed. I'd hand them out the stuff. They'd have a read through it. What do you think of that? Anything you want to add to that? You know sometimes they would, sometimes they wouldn't*

(Student council liaison teacher, Bradfield College).

The tokenism of the consultation was illustrated by the statement that Stephen did not record the students' comments relating to the policy or issue. Notional and tokenistic activities and engagements were played out reflecting the findings and analysis of Alderson, (2000), Cox and Robinson-Pant, (2006), McCowan, (2010). The exchange undermines the key roles of partnership and policy consultation as outlined by the constitution, and the role of the council as forum for voice and change as outlined by the students.

These three events, as described, provided a window into the reality of the operation of the student council beyond the rhetoric of policy, constitution and the aspiration and envisioning of the role by the participants. The embedded and encultured nature of power as exercised through controlling the operation of the council, the maintenance of this culture by the authority of the liaison teacher and the tokenistic and contrived nature of policy consultation in one school is revealed.

These moments also illustrate the colliding elements within Foucault's discourse of the transactions of power and authority. These elements reflect the expression of prefigurative democracy and the depth of the engagement in student voice that the council construct actually represents. While the student council is established and surrounded by the rhetoric of democracy and active citizenship, and the language of representation, the power imperatives of the principal and liaison teacher reflecting the vagueness of the national policy discourse, define the lived reality

for the student members (Cox and Robinson-Pant, 2006; Fielding, 1973; McCowan, 2010; McGrath, 1971). In Foucauldian terms, these councils are controlled within a discourse of power, hierarchical authority and surveillance. This discourse of power is reflected in the admission of contrivance of the council in Bradfield, the role of the principal, the liaison teacher and written constitution in establishing clear boundaries around all three councils, and the directing of each council towards activities and events representing varying degrees of lip service. All reflect the transmission of a power and control discourse that presents the rhetoric of meaningful deep and democratic engagements but in reality provides a largely tokenistic and very limited construct for student voice (Alderson, 2000; Cox and Robinson-Pant, 2006; Keogh and Whyte, 2005; McLoughlin, 2004). These moments also provided a further insight into the discordant voices that define these particular student councils.

The discordance of voices in the articulation of role and its expression in action can be accounted for by the power culture that pervades these schools and in particular the role of the liaison teacher. This teacher, an appointment of the principal in each council, had a persuasive and powerful role in directing the council. Students viewed this as guidance but the requirement for the presence of the liaison teacher at each meeting, the need to seek permission from the principal for activities, the organisation of formal meetings with the principal and the reporting role of this teacher to the principal, points to a culture of control and the enforcement of boundaries that pervades the work and role of each council.

The student council liaison teacher

These established practices over time had encultured the council into a routine of operation in each of the schools. The students, in most cases saw no contradiction in the differences that emerged between their discourse of role and the reality of their operation and activity. The role of the liaison teacher in all three cases, as a long established and assigned post, was woven into the fabric of the council culture. While the students described their relationship with the liaison teacher with respect and as warm in interaction, the element of control in the role became evident in the students' descriptions.

The liaison teacher is a really good idea, sitting in on meetings, she kind of regulates us, and keep's us on track

(Student council member, Castlecourt College).

To guide us in the right direction and to help us out if we get stuck in something

(Student council member, Castlecourt College).

The comments point towards an encultured security of subjugation limiting any risk of straying from the established positioning of students in the school as referenced by McLoughlin, (2004).

The use of 'regulates', 'on track' and 'right direction' points to control, management and guidance in their interaction with the liaison teacher. The students also recognised the power and authority that the teacher represents.

'All the things we discuss and decide upon go through the teacher who liaises with the council. After this things have to be put past the principal and in some cases the board of management.

(Student council member, St Anthony's College).

The teachers' perspective on their role, in the case of Stephen in Bradfield and Dympna in St Anthony's is direct and clear. Dympna sees her role in simple terms that implies the complete power to control agenda and activity.

I oversee everything

There has to be a limit around a teacher or an issue in a class, everything else is open. I guide them and explain it to them

(Student council liaison teacher, St Anthony's College).

Stephen, who described his role as complicit within the contrivance and stage-management of the student council, was direct and similarly negative in his control of the council with the agreement of the school principal. Stephen advised his students... 'on the limits of what we can do'. His control is direct.

If they suit our agenda we will go with them, if not we will pretend we did not hear it

(Student council liaison teacher, Bradfield College).

His control and power over the council was also expressed in his statement that the voice of the council:

Is listened to when it suits, disregarded when it does not

(Student council liaison teacher, Bradfield College).

Lillian in Castlecourt College was more nuanced in her view of her role as guide and one that empowered and motivated the members. She identified her role as one:

To help them, to guide them, to enthuse them, to get them talking about the student council, to make it respectable because over the years people were going into it for a laugh, to up the profile of the council, to help them to delegate and be pro-active

(Student council liaison teacher, Castlecourt College).

This role reflects control, support and a strategy to increase the visibility of the council in the school. While the full-scale annual democratic election of the council can be viewed as a positive and democratic process that reflected a representative council, Lillian's influence on the selection of candidates for president and her wish for a president that she can work with and control seems to emerge from her commentary on the work and role of the president.

In the voting process I would get the people that would be right in the job

Over the years I have had two really good presidents in the six years that I am here, they would liaise with me no problem, because I am the liaison teacher, but then do all the organising, they would write their own speeches, they would energise the rest of the council and they could delegate

(Student council liaison teacher, Castlecourt College).

The unwritten imperative to limit and control the council in both its personnel and their actions again emerges as evidence of the embedded power and control discourse in this school. This demonstrates the functional redundancy of the council as a construct for a representative student voice, an experience of prefigurative democracy or active citizenship in ‘carving a new order of experience’ (Rudduck and Flutter, 2000) for students that would facilitate a meaningful role and partnership role in decision making as ‘radical collegiality and dialogue’ (Fielding, 2004b).

Boundaries - stage directions

Boundaries had also been established in relation to the role and scope of the council activities. Restrictions as outlined by the constitution and the student contract were established from the outset of the term of the council. The liaison teachers were clear in establishing and maintaining these boundaries and their effectiveness could also be measured by their acceptance by students. The students, who expressed such idealistic roles for the council, now willingly embraced the boundaries set by policy and practice in all three schools. Reference is made in two schools to the boundaries as simply acceptable as ‘common sense’.

*Not so much that there are boundaries, it is just that it is more common sense
what we would be able to do*

(Student council member, St Anthony’s College).

The chairperson of Bradfield’s council also spoke of boundaries as...‘common sense and experience’. With very limited negativity, the students seemed to accept the boundaries that were implied by and as ‘common sense’ through their engagement with the council throughout their term of office. While common sense was not directly explained, it pointed to an acceptance that the council could not challenge established school practices and rules, and could not engage in areas concerning the authority of teachers (Cox and Robinson-Pant, 2006). Issues relating to teachers, student behaviour, interpersonal relationships and the well-being of students could not be discussed at the council and were to be brought to the attention of the year-head by the individual student without the benefit of the corporate support of the council. One of the Bradfield students identified this as a clear, limiting and ‘learned’ boundary. In a quotation that reflected the views of St Anthony’s students relating to first year members, this comment from a Bradfield student suggested that students were encultured and immersed in a hierarchical power and authority structure.

*At start we brought up loads of issues but then we learned that most of these
had to be brought to the year head*

(Student council member, Bradfield College).

Bradfield students, who articulated the language of power and negotiation from the outset, were also well aware of limitations to that power by the end of their term. Their commentary reflects the discourse of power and control that permeated all aspects of the council in Bradfield, including the commentary of the principal and liaison teacher. This runs counter to the aspirational role the students that originally articulated a vision for the student council as a forum and voice for students.

If we had more power and authority we could get things done

We are somewhat limited in what we can do

*Meeting the principal at the first meeting where we were told our role and how
to interact with management*

(Student council members, Bradfield College).

These Bradfield students, who had expressed a view of the council as having ‘a say in how to run the school’ seemed fully aware of their subordinated position in the school’s power hierarchy by the end of their term as council officers.

*The council seems to know its place and functions well, we would like to have a
greater voice but we are still only the students*

*We have a certain level of authority but you cannot place too much power on
the students*

(Student council members, Bradfield College).

The students became aware of the power discourse and of their position within the power hierarchy through their engagements in their term of office with the council, through the directions of the principal, the interjections of Stephen, the liaison teacher, and through the limits placed on their engagements as a council (Alderson, 2000; McCowan, 2010; McLoughlin, 2004; Wyness, 2005). Any semblance of democratic power sharing and inclusion of student voice is removed in the telling comments ‘we are still only the students...you cannot place too much power on the students’. These students had learned and tacitly accepted the contrivance of the student council in Bradfield College.

Crossing borders and strategies for change

Realisation of the limiting effect of borders and the control of the liaison teacher emerged in the commentary of students toward the end of their experience in St Anthony’s. The students questioned the lack of interest and support of the wider student body in council activities. While not an elected and representative council, the students seemed to put a strong emphasis on the profile of the council during their term of office through the school notice board, their own website and

posters around the school. Now, these students reflected on their perception by the wider student body, feeling that the council was not taken seriously and was viewed more as a club than a forum for student voice and advocacy.

Most students are aware of it but not all take it seriously

I think it is not so much that we don't communicate with the student body, I think it's the student body don't really want to be communicated with. I don't think the student council is seen as a very cool club to be in so people don't really associate with it

(Student Council members, St Anthony's College).

The students also became aware or highlighted the issue of power and the conflict relating to boundaries and controls and their position as students in the school culture. Lack of trust was articulated as the reason for the imposition of boundaries and control echoing Stephens' sentiments in relation to the council in Bradfield.

If the council had the power to act straight away it would be great but unfortunately this is a delicate area - we are neither adults nor do we run the school so we cannot be completely trusted. This is almost impossible to change

(Student Council member, St Anthony's College).

The council in St Anthony's argued for two strategies for change following their experience of one term of office. One strategy focused on increased consultation by and with school management pointing to a desire for increased power, and the other, in a similar way, pointed to the dominance of event organisation on the council agenda, which was seen to possibly obstruct a role in consultation for the council.

The only way that the council could be better is if it was consulted more on any changes or work decided by higher powers in the school

Move from events to voice, we need a stronger voice, everything they ask we get it done. What we need is less involvement in events

(Student Council members, St Anthony's College).

The process of engagement in both councils, that of Bradfield and St Anthony's seemed to bring a realisation to the students, however limited, of the constraints on the power and potential for the council to become involved in decision-making in the school.

Council members in Castlecourt expressed no significant desire to change the role of the council following their term of office. In discussing their work and their achievements during the year, the president spoke of the lack of issues coming from the classrooms through the class representatives.

There was never anything that came up. It there was something, and we thought it was viable we could actually achieve it if we wanted to, then yes we would...like I said there wasn't anything that came up

(Student council president, Castlecourt College).

One of the class representatives retorted:

Our class wanted our day to be shortened to finish at the same time as the other schools, one shorter day...we are the only school that does not have an early day...we brought it to the council but their hands were tied, they knew nothing could be done

(Student council member, Castlecourt College).

The president, describing the reaction of the liaison teacher, defensively replied:

This is the only issue that I can remember that the liaison teacher said that it was just not going to happen

We all knew what would have happened, there were suggestions to ban homework and change the school uniform, we know that those things are not going to happen

(Student council president, Castlecourt College).

The controlling and filtering power of the liaison teacher and her direction of the council towards event organisation were also evident in the president's comment...

The liaison teacher kind of knew that it wasn't going to happen and persuaded us not to go on that one

(Student council president, Castlecourt College).

This controlling effect also resonated with the principal's comment relating to the regular meeting with the council president. When asked about the issues that were raised at these meetings the principal responded...

Generally they are not demanding at all, I would prefer if they came to me with more...I ask them is there anything you want me to do, they say no it's fine, they do not seem to have issues of complaint or anything

(Principal, Castlecourt College).

The principal then added jokingly:

Maybe they just think everything in the school is perfect

(Principal, Castlecourt College).

These exchanges, towards the end of the school year and of the term of office illustrated how the agenda and the controlling power of the liaison teacher and the principal reflecting the power knowledge discourse of Castlecourt, limited the voice and scope of the council. A challenging proposal around the length of school day was not progressed beyond the stage of suggestion through the combined persuasive roles of the liaison teacher, and that of the president whom the liaison teacher had handpicked and nurtured into the role. The distillation of this suggestion that reflected the representative and advocacy role of the council was managed to a position that it 'wasn't going to happen' again reflecting the findings of Alderson (2000), Chapman (1970b), McLoughlin (2004) and the OMCYA (2011) while also echoing the arguments of Arnot, McIntyre,

Pedder and Reay (2004), Fielding (2001a, 2007, 2011) and Whitty and Wisby (2007) relating to power, control, authentic voice and democratic practice.

Castlecourt students seemed content to continue with their council within the frame of operation that had been established over time by the liaison teacher. The vice president who wished to stand for president in the next school year spoke of expanding the scope of the council as a fundraising body to include the parents association in future fund-raising campaigns. There was no articulated agenda for change.

It might be an asset to the student council if we could get involved with the parents' association because then we could connect not only with the teachers and students but with the parents as well, we could do some fundraising with the parents' association

(Student council vice-president, Castlecourt College).

Thus, the students in all three councils left their term of office with an awareness of their achievements in the context of events, and advocating and succeeding in particular issues and projects. There was also a realisation of the limitation of their power in contrast to their initial view and aspiration for the role of the council. These realisations were strongest in Bradfield and St Anthony's but less so in Castlecourt. The discourse of power and control that surrounds the council construct emerged in each context based on the interpretation of the vague policy script, the disposition of the principal and the translation and implementation of internal policy whether overt or hidden, by the liaison teacher.

The Inspectors' voice

In the absence of a directive policy script and comprehensive qualitative or quantitative data on student councils, inspectors' comments and recommendations in published whole-school evaluation – management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) reports during 2011 (DES, 2011b) provide a further voice and insight into the operation of student councils across a range of post-primary schools. As already cited, just 41% of students surveyed in the course of these evaluations felt that they had a say in how to make their school a better place. A further 36% disagreed while some 23% of these students did not know whether or not they had a say (*ibid.*). Awareness of having a say and the presence of an active student council can be linked. When these reports were published, an analysis revealed some further insights. Inspectors met with representatives of the student council and in the majority of reports commented on the presence and effectiveness of the council. Recommendations to school management to develop the council focused on three main areas. In approximately 25% of reports, school management was requested to improve the democratic representation of the council by holding elections and ensuring that all class groups were represented at the council. In a similar proportion of reports, schools were encouraged to engage in

policy consultation with the student council. A very small proportion of schools were encouraged to raise the profile and visibility of the council and a number were recommended to facilitate contact between the board of management and the student council.

The case-study student councils in this research reflected and also contradicted the findings of these reports. Consultation on policy, but at varying levels of engagement was present within the work of each council. One of the three schools did not have a fully representative student council and also did not organise representative democratic elections. Each of the three councils struggled with visibility but none had interacted formally with the board of management in their school.

Conclusion - the student council as a construct for student voice

Analysis of data gathered from engagement with these case-study student councils provided a situated and contextualised picture of their operation in three Irish post primary schools. Key among the patterns that emerged was the discontinuity of discourse, reflecting Foucault, on the role of the council between the different agents. The contrast reflected the distance between the expressions of role and the lived out experience of the council over one school year. The nature of power, boundaries and enculturation that was embedded in the pattern of council activities also emerged from the research, as did the depth and nature of the activities and involvements of the council. The extent to which these involvements represented right, partnership, participation and active, democratic citizenship emerged as a significant question.

These student council case studies presented a construct for student voice in post-primary school that reflect the potential for rights, participation and prefigurative democracy. This construct includes potential for partnership and active citizenship. However, the experience of these councils through one school year and the analysis of data that represented the voices of students, liaison teachers and school principals, presented a largely tokenistic representation of students' rights, their participation through partnership in consultation and dialogue in the affairs of the school, and their experience of democracy. This tokenism, although emergent to varying degrees in different cases, arises from the deployment of boundaries and limitations through the established culture of power and control in each school. While the rhetoric of voice, participation, engagement and inclusion were evident in the expectation of students and in the written and voiced discourse of the liaison teacher and the principal, the actual afforded experience of students was one of a controlled and limited voice managed by the liaison teacher through the direction of the principal. Therefore, the student council did not reflect a meaningful construct for a democratic, participative and rights-based student voice in these schools due in part to the absence of a directive policy script for the role, purpose and operation of the construct. Neither was there any evident link between the

prefigurative democratic and active citizenship aspirations of the council and the CSPE curriculum as taught in these schools.

Strategic school-based decisions had established a student council but limited, controlled and in one case contrived its role and operation to a position of varying degrees of tokenism. The purpose of the strategy arguably was compliance with the widespread expectation that schools should provide a student council but through tokenistic involvements, maintain power and authority in key areas of decision-making in the hands teachers and school management.

Curtain...

Epilogue: The Greek Chorus

The Greek Chorus comes into view as the footlights are illuminated. Its role is one of commentary and observation, leading to the explanation and elucidation of the key messages of the drama for the audience.

Introduction

PRIOR TO THIS research intervention a student council existed and operated in the three case-study schools as a construct for student voice. Its expression of that voice was bounded by policy, practice and power. While largely a representative structure at whole-school level, the work of all three councils was limited by the boundaries established by the authority of the principal, expressed through the control of the liaison teacher and bounded by practice and procedure in each school. The work of the council was in all cases confined to event organisation for students, fundraising and limited and sometimes tokenistic involvements in decision-making.

In the classroom, students' everyday experience of pedagogy within their situated classroom context and relationship with their teacher engaged their voices to varying degrees in pedagogy. This ranged from students' voices in active and participative student-centred classroom practices to more passive and teacher-directed engagements. However, student voice through dialogic consultation revealed a commentary that was directed towards the teacher. Concordance of voice emerged in students' desire for a classroom experience that was positive, safe, engaging and stimulating. Discordance emerged in relation to the backdrop and significant impact of curriculum and external examinations on pedagogy. Students' and teachers' voices expressed contested viewpoints relating to their expectations and experiences of pedagogy as they progressed through junior cycle towards the Junior Certificate examination and onwards via Transition Year towards their Leaving Certificate.

Student voice in the classroom:

Firstly, focusing on student voice in the classroom, it could be argued that teachers' practice in the case-study classrooms was guided by a loose pedagogical script as gleaned from curriculum documents, inspectorate reports and developed in their own practice over time. In the absence of a coherent pedagogical framework to guide practice, teachers and students identified the demands of examinations, informed by and reflecting subject syllabi, as very significant in forming their experience and expectation of pedagogy. Lynch and Lodge (2002), Smyth (2006, 2007, 2009) and

Hyland (2011) identify the impact of an increasing examinations discourse on teachers' practice and on the students' experience of pedagogy as they advance through junior cycle to senior cycle.

Students' commentary on their everyday experiences in classes indicated a balance between teacher direction and control of progress in line with the demands of curriculum and examination, and more student-centred and interactive experiences that facilitated their engagement and participation. Dialogic consultation, facilitated by their teachers, identified a pattern in the discourse that was conflicted between students' requests for increased engagement with interactive and participative pedagogy and their increasing demand and expectation for distilled knowledge to allow them to navigate the challenges of the high-stakes external examinations that they faced. Deeper analysis of these patterns revealed a more nuanced and situated experience and interaction reflecting Lodge (2005) Rose and Shevlin (2010), Rudduck, Chaplin and Wallace (1996) and SooHoo (1993). These experiences revealed the individualised and contextual nature of relationships between students and teachers within the intimate and private pedagogical space that is their classroom.

The students' voices spoke of their needs, their joys and their struggles in each classroom. They articulated the importance of positive relationships with peers and teachers, and their expectation of a well-managed classroom where they could feel safe and confident to engage, findings that echo across student voice research (Nieto, 1994; Rudduck, 2002, 2006, 2007; Rudduck, Chaplin and Wallace, 1996; SooHoo, 1993).

The students variously spoke of the tedium of notes, of the importance of notes, of their ability to disengage and their liking for visuals, videos, group work and projects; activities and experiences that allowed them to speak, to act, and to be active within the classroom. Fear and insecurity towards the examination was expressed in their desire for notes and hand-out materials to prepare for examinations.

While expressing general positivity toward being afforded a voice, and towards their experiences in classrooms, the students' voices also identified changes in these experiences as they moved through the years from first-year to sixth-year towards their Leaving Certificate in two of the schools. Castlecourt and St Anthony's students revealed a shifting pattern from active student-centred pedagogy in first year and second year, towards more didactic teacher-directed experiences as they progressed towards examinations. In Bradfield College however, the students' experience of pedagogy seemed dominated by didactic teacher-directed experiences that remained unchanged from first year to sixth year, including TY.

Student voice emerging through dialogic consultation presented a somewhat confused and discordant discourse relating to these experiences of pedagogy. The students highlighted and challenged experiences that were overly didactic and that placed them as passive in the classroom. These practices were challenged through their requests for experiences that were engaging and interactive reflecting Arnot, McIntyre, Pedder and Reay (2004), Rudduck, Chaplin and Wallace (1996) and Rudduck and Flutter (2004a). In individual cases and with individual teachers, some students challenged pedagogy viewed as transmission symbolised by note taking, while others sought the maintenance or an increase in this practice. Universally, the students recognised their teachers' engagement and reaction to their requests, and articulated their positivity towards the process and their perception of its outcomes mirroring the findings and analysis of Arnot, McIntyre, Pedder and Reay (2004), Rudduck (2006), Rudduck and Flutter (2004b).

Teachers' perceptions of the process and of the students' requests were largely positive and stimulated much reflection. Their initial apprehension and fears relating to consultation with their students were short-lived as they viewed the positive commentary of the students and the constructive nature of their requests for change – this is similar to the findings of MacBeath, *et al.* (2003), Nieto (1994), Rudduck (2005) and SooHoo (1993). Teachers' responses were situated and contextualised to their particular class group, subject and stage in cycle. Their individualised responses varied. One teacher responded very positively to first-year students who made specific requests in relation to their experience of history class. Teaching approaches in one second-year mathematics class were considerably changed by the teacher and met with the approval of the students. The discordant commentary of some second-year and third-year students drew a varied response. While increased use of cooperative learning strategies, tasks and visual materials was introduced and recognised by the students, practice in relation to note taking was either introduced as in one case, or maintained, in others. Concerns among some teachers relating to loss of control continued.

At senior cycle, teachers reflected upon and changed their practice based on strong commentary from students. In TY, the students recognised and reacted to the continuation and retention of elements of established pedagogical practice that had been embedded since their junior cycle experience. At fifth-year and sixth-year level, teachers' responses were also situated, individualised and varied. A fifth-year geography class was observed by their teacher to respond very positively to increased cooperative learning, peer assessment opportunities and hands-on activities. The provision of increased choices and opportunities to engage actively with drama resulted in increased engagement from potentially disengaged fifth-year students. Reflection by another teacher resulted in the decision to meet the requests of senior students for no change in

their experience of a teacher-directed and transmission pedagogy focused on the examination. This emerged from the dialogic consultation with senior mathematics and economics students.

Each of these engagements and outcomes reflected the situated and individualised nature of the student voice interaction through a dialogic consultation that took place over one school year. The process, even as afforded by privilege rather than by right, highlighted the normalised silencing of students within a pedagogical script informed by a culture of teacher authority bounded by curriculum and examination (Devine, 2003a; Lynch and Lodge, 2002). In the main, everyday practice revealed itself as positioning the teacher as expert and director of pedagogy and viewing student voices as silent in decision-making and in commentary on pedagogical experience. However, dialogic consultation illuminated a continuum of pedagogical practice that situated individual classroom experiences. The consultation identified contrasting positions reflecting students' requests for changed experiences of pedagogy and yet, in other cases, the maintenance of practices focused on examinations. It underscored how pedagogical experiences that were still teacher directed, potentially oscillated in their position on the continuum from didactic to active in relation to subject type, year group and examination.

The outcomes for students at a social and relational level, arising from student voice, as articulated in their comments, concerned respect, peer and teacher relationships and trust in their teachers' work with them. From a pedagogical viewpoint, students identified increased student-centred classroom activities that were engaging and enjoyable. These findings echo across student voice discourse and research (Cook-Sather, 2002, 2006, 2009, 2010; Fielding, 1999; Flutter and Rudduck, 2004; Meighan, 1974, 1977, 1978a, 1978b; Mitra, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2007; Thompson, 2007; Veldman and Peck, 1963, 1969).

For many teachers, engagement with these active student-centred teaching methods arising from student voice resulted in evident gains in students' achievements in test and examinations and in the quality of their written work. These improvements in engagement, participation and learning are previously identified in student voice literature and research (Cook-Sather 2002; Mitra 2004; Smyth, J. 2007; Wilson and Corbett 2007). Teachers identified increased engagement and enjoyment from students in their interactions in class and the inclusion of marginalised, quieter and often silent students. These findings are also reflective of the work of a range of student voice researchers including Mitra, Shevlin and Rose, and Enright and O'Sullivan.

From the perspective of their own identity, teachers reflected on their own practice through the dialogic consultation process and through the students' commentary on their experiences. Teachers' reactions and their belief in the impact of a sustained student voice varied. Their views

were challenged to some degree by the perceived shift in their position on the stage due to the inclusion of student voice but particularly by the challenges of curriculum and examination and the expectations of students.

Notwithstanding these articulated gains arising from dialogic consultation, just two teachers signalled significant and sustained engagement with student voice and with student-centred pedagogy throughout the school year that followed the research period. Interestingly, students of these teachers had made the strongest comments on their pedagogical experiences in their classrooms. Their voices, perhaps stimulated and fostered a sustained reflection and change in pedagogy as praxis – action arising from reflection leading to transformation (Freire, 1970).

The student council – under the spotlights

Through the lens of rights, the presence of a student council in school reflects provision for the right of students to express a view and to have a say with the expectation that their views will be heard and engaged within the context of decisions that affect them. In schools in the UK, student councils are viewed from a policy perspective as being the central construct for the expression of these rights (Alderson, 2000) in parallel with the range of other student voice strategies based on consultation with students relating to their experiences of the school. In the absence of a clear and directive policy framework for Irish schools and based on the analysis of findings in these case-study schools, it is questionable whether the student council construct provides such a structure or space for these rights to find meaningful expression (Lundy, 2007). The council construct exists, has visibility and presence for the student body and those who participate directly within it, but the operation, while tacitly democratic, is limited and bounded by procedure and regulation. Meetings in one school were infrequent, the liaison teachers had complete control, restrictions on the discussion of some issues existed, consultation relating to decision-making was limited, event organisation dominated the agenda, and the school principal had complete power and veto on council activities. In these contexts, the student council was severely circumscribed as a construct to represent and express students' rights.

The lens of participation also facilitates a view of the council in these schools as a construct for students' engagement in matters that affect them. Typologies of participation provide a scale or measure for the depth of students' participation in decision-making (Hart, 1992), or in engagement with student voice (Fielding, 2001; Fielding and McGregor, 2005; Flutter and Rudduck, 2004). The absence of engagement, or evidence of a tokenistic engagement reflects the lower levels of any participation scale, while active participation in decision-making and engagement of students as co-researchers with teachers are envisaged as high levels of meaningful participation.

Using these scales of participation, students in the case-study student councils were limited in the extent to which they were facilitated to participate in decision-making relating to matters that affected them. The council provided a forum to express students' concerns and to raise issues (Keogh and Whyte, 2005) but boundaries and rules restricted engagement in discussion with issues of pedagogy or student-teacher relationships. Advocacy procedures did exist and were effective in addressing issues relating to improving facilities and physical infrastructure. Advocacy in relation to rules and procedures reflecting the established operations of the school were bounded and limited, while participation in events that promote social responsibility were encouraged.

Two of the councils had engaged in projects to support students learning through researching study skills and the use of the school website. Policy consultation was evident at different levels on the ladder of participation (Hart 1992). A student representative on a policy review subcommittee with teachers and parents reflected high level participation in one school, while the contrived and tokenistic engagements in policy review with the student councils in two of the case-study schools reflected very low levels or an absence of participation. Elections ensured representation in two councils, while one did not draw representatives from all class groups and operated on the basis of students expressing an interest and therefore securing a nomination to the council. This council particularly struggled with participation from the wider student body.

Experience in these case-study student councils points to a construct that facilitated low levels of participation that in some areas was tokenistic with very low levels of involvement in decision-making. Participation in a student council should reflect active involvement and related responsibilities (Fielding, 1973) but without the power to act, to challenge or to effect change, a council construct is characterised by tokenism (Cox and Robinson-Pant, 2006).

Democratic practice in schools provides a further and equally related lens for analysis of the student council construct. The student council is viewed as a key instrument and expression of democracy in schools (Fielding 2001; O'Gorman, 1998).

Education for democracy emphasises rights, empowerment of stakeholders that includes students, and participation in decision-making within a structured democratic environment (Dürr, 2004). It equally raises the contestation between democracy as a concept to be taught on the curriculum and the facilitation of participative democratic opportunities and constructs in schools. Significant argument points towards the value of the experience of participative democracy (Huddleston, 2007; Kelly, 1995; McCowen, 2011). The absence of participative democratic structures in schools can be indicative of the exclusion of students (Ranson, 2000) and their continued subordination

into passive roles (Keogh and Whyte, 2005; McLoughlin, 2004). Student councils are therefore central to students' right to have a voice and to participate in decision-making in schools (Huddleston, 2007). They also provide a forum, outside of the classroom, for inclusive democratic conversations that are characterised by participation and dialogue but also conflict and challenge (Shultz, 2009).

The concordance of voices in the case-study schools in relation to the potential of the council to provide a forum for a representative student voice to have a say and a role in decision-making reflected democratic practice (Keogh and Whyte, 2005). Elections, a forum for discussion, communication with students and with the principal, and a role and voice in policy development and in decision-making, underscored the potential for dialogue, communication and consultation within an inclusive democratic structure. However, discordance was revealed when these structures were analysed and interrogated. The reality of the students' experience to varying degrees represented a very narrow democratic experience bounded by established and hierarchical power structures as identified earlier (Wyness, 2005; Wyse, 2001). Election or nomination processes provided democratic experiences for students, as did their attendance at the forum table of the council meeting where they could have their voice heard. However, as illustrated by the analysis of the students' voices, democracy in relation to agenda items, advocacy for change, or challenge to established practices in schools were bounded in a combined power and control discourse by the constitution, in some cases by the direction of the principal and in all cases by the close scrutiny and control of the liaison teacher. In terms of Foucault, students' democratic role in decision-making was either contrived as was the case in one council or controlled in the others, directed towards event organisation and management, and towards advocacy for the provision or improvement of facilities for students (Arnot and Reay, 2007; Fielding 2007, 2011).

Students' realisation of the limitation for their potential to engage in democratic processes also emerged from the research when they were questioned about their involvements during the school year. The students did identify their engagement with the council as a forum for discussion (McGrath, 1971), and their impact on improving facilities for students, but also realised the limitations of their power (Keogh and Whyte, 2005). However, these students accepted without challenge the discourse of control that provided tokenistic or contrived involvements, and largely excluded them from democratic practices in their school, arguably, in line with the findings of the Democracy commission (2005):

Student councils give students a voice but not a say

(ibid., p. 33).

The invitation to the student council chairperson to become part of a consultative review of policy with parents and teachers represents the only exception to this contention and reflects the recommendations of inspectorate reports (DES, 2011b). Inclusion in policy consultation has the potential to provide some element of prefigurative democratic practice and experience for that council. It is significant though that the students did not view this engagement or opportunity as particularly meaningful, in contrast to their accounts of other activities. This is indicative possibly of their acceptance of subjugation of the potential for democratic engagements and consultation in these schools that is replaced by event organisation and fundraising.

The student council as an opportunity to develop, model and provide education for active citizenship, is another lens of analysis. The student council is recognised as a construct that offers significant opportunities for citizenship education (Jeffers and O'Connor, 2008; Keogh and Whyte, 2005) but is challenged by the disconnect between opportunities for active citizenship in schools as represented by engagement with the student council and the provision of taught citizenship programmes on the curriculum (Mannion, 2007). The absence of a coherent curricular script to establish obvious linkage between citizenship education, and the potential of the student council as a construct for participative prefigurative democracy and active citizenship, has not been developed in Irish education (Jeffers and O'Connor, 2008; O'Gorman, 1998).

Linkage between the student council and CSPE as the taught citizenship programme on the curriculum in Irish post-primary schools was not apparent in any of the case study schools reflecting the analysis of Jeffers and O'Connor (2008) and Mannion (2007). The CSPE syllabus (DES, 1995) outlined a clear aim to prepare students for active citizenship. Similarly, pedagogical support resources (OMYCA, 2007) provided significant ideas and opportunities to establish linkages and interconnections between the students' experiences with CSPE and the student council in their school. No such linkages were evident in the case-study schools. This reflected a lost opportunity in the context of further developing active participative citizenship through obvious connections with a curricular programme.

The potential for active citizenship was apparent in the students' experience of the student council in the case-study schools. Participation in election processes was central to that experience in two of the schools and engagement in fundraising projects and the associated personal commitment, team work and volunteerism was evident in the event organisation and management agenda in all three schools. Thus the council provided the forum for discussion, teamwork, decision-making and student leadership in relation to these projects in all three schools. The educational potential of these experiences, when placed against the key skills framework (NCCA, 2009b), particularly in the areas of being personally effective, communicating, critical and creative thinking and working

with others, is obvious and reflects the experiences of the students to varying degrees in each school but particularly in Castlecourt and in St Anthony's who were active in event organisation and management.

Conclusion - a drama of voices

The experience of the drama of student voice in these schools should leave the audience with a positive view of the potential for student voice in pedagogy. The relational interaction between student and teacher underpins pedagogy and students' learning, and embraces the traditional position and identity of the teacher as one of authority combined with professional expert. Affording students a voice in their classroom through dialogic consultation presents a range of positives in the context of interpersonal relationships, pedagogical change and improved learning. Challenges include a potential or perceived change in power and authority in the classroom and discordant voices in the context of the pressure of the examination backwashing into pedagogy to impact on teachers' practice and students' expectations.

Students' right to have a say or a voice at whole-school level is afforded through the student council. The council has the potential to provide a construct for meaningful participation, prefigurative democracy and an experience of active citizenship. The councils' in the case-study schools provided a largely representative democratic structure for student voice but their potential as a representative forum to facilitate students to have a say was very limited and bounded by the power and authority of the principal as transacted by the liaison teachers. Therefore, the potential and capacity for a democratic and representative student voice within these councils was translated either into tokenistic activity, contrived involvements with decision-making, or towards student event organisation or charity fundraising. The opportunity for a deep, person-centred student voice reflecting rights, participative democracy and active citizenship was not realised in these schools.

Part IV

The Final Curtain



Chapter 7 – The Balcony View

Chapter 7 – The Balcony View

Introduction

IN THE PREVIOUS acts, the audience has looked on, as the three dramatic questions were played out on stage. Firstly, the nature of students' voices in their current pedagogical experiences and how their voices were heard in the classroom was exposed. Secondly, the question of how a student voice of dialogic consultation transacted in the classroom was revealed. Finally, the drama of the student council as a construct for student voice in the whole school unfolded. The exposition, scrutiny and analysis of each question revealed a chorus of voices, soliloquys and sub plots reflecting concordances and discordances, which were explored in seeking to understand the dynamics, directions and challenges of student voice in a post-primary school. The balcony view now allows for the performance to be further reviewed and critiqued.

Students' voices in pedagogy

The resolution of this research question sets the base line for the students experience in pedagogy based on their voices in the eighteen classrooms as accessed through questionnaire, interview and reflection. The commonality in the voices of students particularly focused on the value they placed on their relationship with their teacher. Within the range of classroom contact throughout their different subjects, students valued a positive relationship with their teacher from the perspective of their progress in learning but also for their safety and well-being, and for a sense of fun and enjoyment of the classroom interaction. There was some variation in terms of age in this context. Younger first-year and second-year students looked to their teacher for security, classroom management and guidance towards preparation for assessment. Older students, particularly those in senior cycle, sought a combination of competence and capacity in pedagogy and examination preparation, but also wanted to be treated as adults in the context of classroom relationships and interactions. Some students spoke of their expectation that teachers would earn students' respect through fair and collegial interactions over time. In essence, the students voiced feelings and expectations of a secure classroom-learning environment that was well managed by the teacher in the context of progress and learning, but that was underpinned by positive relationships, respect and trust.

Directly linked to the significance of relationships was the importance that students placed on pedagogy and their recognition of the authority and control of the teacher in the classroom. Students described class rules, expectations relating to homework and clear teacher direction in

decision-making relating to pedagogy. The students expressed their respect and expectation of this role for their teacher but also recognised that control and teacher direction, in the absence of the aforementioned mutual respect and trust, resulted in negativity and animosity in classroom relationships.

Teachers' commentary throughout the research was underpinned by their professional commitment to their students in the context of their well-being, the creation of a positive classroom climate, and their awareness of the expectation on their role as teachers to teach and to guide students through the demands of curriculum and examination. They also spoke of boundary and control in the context of their classroom management and in some cases of the challenge of engaging with mixed-ability class groups, those in need of particular supports and students who were somewhat disengaged by their experiences of pedagogy and the confines and demands of school life generally.

Both students' and teachers' commentary positioned relationship and respect as central to pedagogy and the classroom experience. Within the expressed expectations based on experiences, the roles and positioning of students and teachers also emerged. The ascribed authority of the teacher, and the expectations of students, placed the teacher in control of the pace, direction, experience and boundaries of pedagogy. Students, while expressing clear hopes and expectations, were subject to the decisions of their teacher but were aware and made aware of the demands of syllabus and the examination in the context of pedagogy and classroom experiences and did not have a voice or any say in these decisions.

The aforementioned relationships pointed to classrooms as social settings informed by interaction and positive relationships. Engagement and participation was largely interactive, secure and positive while informed and circumscribed by teacher direction and control, and pedagogy, as described and experienced by students, reflected these circumstances. Students described a largely teacher-directed pedagogy but one that varied from being overly didactic and passive from the students' perspective, to experiences that were student-centred, active and engaging. Beyond these generalisations, students' voices described situated experiences that were informed primarily by the variables of subject and age, reflecting students' position within the six-year school cycle. Position in this cycle was critical in the context of examinations.

The voices of the students addressed the first research question in describing experiences that can be positioned on a continuum between the poles of pedagogy that was didactic, teacher-directed and controlled, and one that was student-centred, active, social and participative. The students' descriptions placed subjects and teachers in different positions on the continuum controlled by the

variables of age in relation to position in the examination cycle, and pedagogy in individual subjects. Interestingly, the students placed one teacher in two different positions on this continuum, based on their experience in two subjects taught by that teacher. In Castlecourt College, Ita's students' commentary on second year mathematics placed pedagogy towards didactic transmission, while her students in fifth-year geography positioned pedagogy in their classroom firmly as active and student-centred.

In the context of the initial research question, student voice is silent in the context of decision-making in normal classroom experiences. Consultation and dialogue do not form part of the classroom experience. Clearly, students' voices were active in learning through discussion and social interaction within classroom experiences that broadly reflected a constructivist framing of pedagogy. Their voices were less intense and largely silent in pedagogy that was didactic and dominated by the voice of the teacher. Significant reference to note taking reflected this didactic teacher-directed pedagogy. It was also indicative of an examination script that was expressed particularly by students in Bradfield College, to a limited extent in St Anthony's where it focused on second year class groups, but was initially almost non-existent in Castlecourt. Following the dialogic consultation, the overarching importance of notes and insecurity relating to examinations emerged as a growing concern for students in all three schools.

These student voices, reflecting normalised classroom experiences prior to dialogic consultation were expressed against the vagueness of the pedagogical script in post-primary schools in Ireland, and pointed to the effects of examinations on students' expectations and experiences, and on teachers' practice. They point to students who were aware of their experiences within the constructs of the classroom and the timetable, and who were equally concerned and aware of their relationship with their teacher who largely controlled their classroom experience.

A voice of dialogic consultation was afforded to students in their classroom within this research. While student voice in other jurisdictions was motivated by a children's rights agenda, by inspection, school self-evaluation, school improvement, education for democracy or inclusion, no such motivation for dialogue and consultation between students and their teachers in the classroom context existed in the Irish education system.

Engaging with the process, notwithstanding apprehension and the varying interpretations by two of the teachers, clearly illustrated that a meaningful consultation can take place in the context of positive relationships between students and teachers in Irish classrooms. The process demonstrates that students within the post-primary age range can engage in dialogic consultation, and that

students have meaningful things to say to their teachers. Initial apprehension and fears of negativity or of rating of teachers' performance did not emerge from the consultation.

The interactive influence of subject, teacher and position within the examination cycle encompassed the range of voices and issues that students raised. At a general level, there was concordance in the students' requests for continuity or increased active student-centred pedagogy within which they could interact with their peers on tasks or activities in class. Students spoke of more activity, visual stimulus, discussion and practical hands-on project work, valuing pedagogy that engaged them actively, and associating these experiences with enjoyment and enhanced learning. Two class groups however, were consistent in their requests for no change in a classroom experience that was significantly teacher-directed and focused on examination preparation that included substantial note taking.

The discordance in commentary emerged in the context of note taking and examination preparation. First-year and TY students reacted strongly against their experience of note taking as part of their classroom experience as they were some years away from external examinations. In second year, significant discordance emerged as students were divided on their desire for the active and engaging experiences that they had already experienced or requested, and the increasing impact of the impending Junior Certificate examination. Gender emerged as a variable in two class contexts, one in second year and one in TY. The girls in these classes either requested the introduction of some note taking or its modification to key learning points.

Students clearly valued pedagogy that can be positioned on the continuum moving towards social constructivism. Their voices also reflected the residual effect of external examinations on pedagogy in Irish post-primary classrooms. As early as second year in junior cycle, the examinations discourse demanding distilled knowledge, factual recall and skills to equip students for predominantly terminal written examinations began to emerge in their voices on pedagogy. This conflicted to some degree with their descriptions of the pedagogy that they experienced. Note taking did not feature strongly in these original descriptions. However, when afforded their voice in dialogic consultation many students requested, in one case, the introduction of some note taking, and in others, increased engagement with this classroom activity reflecting a desire for a position on the continuum closer to didactic teacher-directed pedagogy as they advanced towards examinations.

Teachers reflected on the students' commentary and responded to their voice in general by introducing a range of student-centred activities to their classes that focused particularly on the collaborative activities of group and pair work. They also addressed other context-specific

requests. Significantly, teacher and student voice were in accord in their reactions to the changes. Students were positive and recognised the changes made by their teachers in the context of increased trust and respect in their relationship but also in increased inclusion, engagement and participation in a number of settings. Teachers also recognised these changes but significantly, also saw increased understanding and improvements in examination performance at classroom level following the pedagogical changes introduced.

Both students' and teachers' voices, arguably arising from their shared enterprise in the classroom, also reflected continued concern for the examination following the consultation and the resultant changes. A section of the student cohort, particularly in second year, continued to voice their concern for notes and examination preparation while recognising the positive changes introduced by their teachers.

A drama of dance

*O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?*

(Among School Children, WB Yeats, 1928)

From the balcony it seemed as if a dance emerged from the drama. A number of movements were discernable without seeming to be choreographed. The orchestra behind these movements was the curriculum and the examination as conducted by the individual teachers. The different subjects and individualised relationships with teachers within those classrooms created individual dance movements. The overall movement of the actors on the stage however, formed a forward and backward oscillation between a voiced desire for a student-centred pedagogy that was then repressed and regressed by the introduction of a curriculum and examination overture whose backwash rhythms affected pedagogy in almost all subjects. This two-handed movement between student and teacher saw first-year voices seeking experiences that were active, engaging and participative. Second-year voices, challenged by the growing chorus of examinations, were conflicted in their requests for active pedagogy and therefore also demanded a clear focus on examination that limited their engagement in the experiences that they so valued. TY students, recognising the *adagio* in the piece, as the temporary absence of curriculum and examination from the performance, were strong in their demands for a return to a student-centred, active and engaging pedagogy, while their teachers seemed to continue to dance to the beat of the examination. In fifth and sixth year, the drum roll of curriculum and examination found resonance once more but the choreography became individualised by subject and by teacher. Geography students in Castlecourt recognised their requested movement with their teacher towards student-centred pedagogy while the mathematicians and economists in Bradfield held firmly to their

rhythm and didactic beat from the outset. Student voice identified this oscillating beat in pedagogy and revealed the regressive influence of curriculum and examination on the music and rhythm of the staged performance.

Teachers also took part in this dance and swayed to the beat of the student voice in introducing new experiences in the classroom. They saw the changes as positive and, while unsure of their steps and possibly who was leading the dance, they recognised the new rhythm of improved learning, engagement, participation and inclusion. While all the teachers reflected on their parts and on their affordance of a new experience of dialogic consultation, just two of the nine seemed changed in their practice and in their identity as teachers. The other cast members reflected on their experiences of the drama, recognised the positive experiences for their students, but in the absence of any policy or directive motivation, returned to their oscillation on the pedagogical continuum and to their control of the rhythm of the dance

Nevertheless, two of the teachers developed a new dance. Through their reflection on the voices of their students they changed their practice and performance, and in so doing changed within themselves as teachers. The students' insights shone the spotlight on their practice and revealed aspects of their pedagogical dance where change was deemed necessary. It is encouraging that this change in dance and in rhythm was sustained.

The dancer from the dance

This dance, this drama of voices is suggesting that student voice in the classroom can have a significant impact on students' engagement, participation and achievement. Dialogic consultation facilitates students to share their experiences with their teacher and challenges teachers to mediate these changes in the classroom.

The dance and the dancers identified the significant impact of the curriculum and of the examination script placed in middle and upper secondary school. The voices on stage saw pedagogy responding to this script and thus students were conflicted between need and desire. The challenge of discordant student voices and equally, the potential to include marginalised, silent or silenced voices was revealed, as was the perception of challenge to the position and authority of the teacher. The changed position of the student from silent and passive to active and agentic emerged through student voice.

From the balcony viewpoint, the research drama has revealed that affording student voice in pedagogy presents positive opportunities for students and teachers with identifiable but not

insurmountable challenges. While the curriculum and examination are fixed, their impact is far reaching. Student voice in pedagogy provides both an insight and a significant counter current to their backwash effect. The dancers and the dance, as student voice, teachers and pedagogy, are inseparable as they are situated and individualised by school, by subject, by teacher-student relationship and by stage in cycle. This situated and contextualised student voice is characterised by relationship, trust and potential for change in experience. It is not the instrumental student voice of data source, accountability or performativity.

The student council from the balcony

The student council presents a different aspect of the drama and an alternative dance. A policy framework outlines the establishment and expected structure of a student council that has been reinforced by the inclusion of the student council members in whole-school evaluations. The student council is the only established construct for student voice in Irish schools and is framed from this emergent policy and evaluation discourse as the construct to represent students' rights and their experience of prefigurative democracy and active citizenship in schools.

The observation of student council meetings, the council constitution, the voices of the students, liaison teachers and principals initially presented a harmonious scene. The rhetoric of voice and democracy were largely unified but different emphases were expressed. Students saw their role as a representative voice for advocacy and communication. Two of the three liaison teachers echoed this role but included activity, event organisation and policy consultation. One teacher, while outlining a similar role for the council directly identified this role as contrived, managed and controlled by school authorities based on lack of trust in students.

The school principals also articulated a role for the council as a representative voice for students and reflected the policy discourse in outlining involvements in policy ratification and development, and a representative role in advocating for improvements in day-to-day conditions for students without significant reference to event organisation and fundraising activity.

The enactment of the role of the councils through the school year and the established boundaries created significant discordance. The work of the council was structured around elections, meetings of the council, communicating with the liaison teacher and occasional meetings with the principal. The actual involvements of the council throughout the school year contrasted significantly with the articulated roles and pointed to a contrived, controlled and managed process.

“Cast a cold eye, on life, on death. Horseman, pass by!”

(Epitaph to WB Yeats)

A cold eye cast from the balcony on the student council aspect of the drama in post-primary schools identified a number of patterns and issues. The backdrop of policy was weak and did not provide a definition of the role of the council or a clear outline for its structure and operation in schools. Interpretation of role differed between the actors but there was a clear sense that role was controlled and bounded by both overt and covert strategies.

Overtly, it was controlled by the constitution and by the rules representing the power and authority of the principal and liaison teacher. Its role was also controlled by the limitations placed on its activities, the clear role of the liaison teacher and the obvious direction of the energies of the council towards event organisation and fundraising. Control was exerted through focusing the potential role of the council towards representation and advocacy on day-to-day conditions rather than contributing to deeper decision-making. The varying, low-key, tokenistic and contrived function in policy development and ratification was another indicator of this diminution of role.

Covertly, power, authority and control underpinned the action of the council. The hidden controls of encultured procedure that were reinforced by the liaison teacher limited the council as a voice for students. Covert control strategies, it is argued, included the meeting with the principal to establish the role and direction of the council, the location of that meeting in the principal's office, the requirement of the presence of the liaison teacher at all council meetings, the limitation of the term of office of the council to one year and the infrequency of meetings, and the requirement of an endorsement from a class teacher before seeking a nomination to the council. These strategies, arguably worked to narrow the role and the impact of the student council.

The interpretation of voice as communication rather than as consultation and dialogue was a further limitation. The filtering of agenda items by the liaison teachers and their interjection at meetings controlled the issues that were progressed and what was valued as appropriate to the council agenda. The implied manipulation and control of the chairperson, suggesting the empowerment of some students to run for the office and the establishment of a rapport of control to manage that role is suggested as a further sub plot.

Student council members were students, young citizens, and almost all were children under the age of eighteen. To engage in a democratic process requires support, training, induction and possibly mentoring. Without such supports, their role and voice in decision-making or in any *‘involvement in the affairs of the school’* (Education Act, 1998) as enacted during one school year was limited to

event organisation and fundraising, and to largely tokenistic and sometimes contrived involvements in decision-making. Curriculum links to education for democracy through CSPE and the expression of prefigurative democracy were not evident. Any struggle for voice as dialogue and consultation within an emancipatory or constructionist framing of the student council was non-existent.

To cast a cold eye over the student council drama from a balcony seat in addressing the research question, it is clear that the student council in its current construct, as represented by engagement with the three case-study councils did not represent an expression of prefigurative democracy and did not facilitate students to have a meaningful role or voice in school decision making. The depth of participation was low level and often tokenistic, and the controlling roles of the principal and liaison teachers were exposed.

The critic and the review

The final action in this drama of voices is to review the emerging implications for policy and future study, and to focus a critical, and cold eye, on the production values of the drama itself.

In Irish education, the scaffolding for student voice is in place and the imperative is compelling. The scaffolding has a number of layers. Ireland's ratification of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1992) sets the first layer followed by a series of initiatives and responses included in the Education Act (1998), the National Children's Strategy (2000) and the publication of student council guidelines (DES, 2002). Each of these initiatives established a policy foundation for the sequential journey towards a rights-based student voice in post-primary schools. In parallel, educational research, policy and curriculum initiatives, and school inspection have engaged the views of students as an authentic inclusion of the neglected and silent partner, and the *raison d'être* of schools.

The year 2012 was a significant one for student voice in Ireland. The imperative to strategically facilitate student voice by right in schools significantly advanced with the implementation of school self-evaluation processes in Irish schools (Inspectorate, 2012a). For the first time, a student voice of dialogue and consultation is presented within a policy framework for implementation in schools. The passing of the thirty-first amendment to the constitution (Referendum Commission, 2012) providing a right for children to have their views considered in judicial proceedings also signified growing awareness, advancement and action in relation to the voice of the child in matters that affect them.

A seismic revision of the junior cycle curriculum and the Junior Certificate examination (DES, 2012a) is designed to eliminate the significance of this examination due to its impact on pedagogy. It is to be replaced by a radically altered junior cycle experience for students that reduces the significance of specific subjects, introduces statements of learning, and assessment for learning that is continuous and school based. This change in the curriculum and pedagogical script, beginning in 2014, should eliminate the *'backwash'* effect of the current Junior Certificate examination. It should end the insecurity of students and help to curtail didactic teacher-centred pedagogy.

This research study attempts to advance the imperative of the embedding of student voice in pedagogy in Irish post-primary classrooms. The imperative is primarily one of right. Students have a right to have a say, to have an appropriate voice, to be listened to, and to have a reasonable expectation of action and reaction in their classroom experience and interaction with their teacher. This call, arising from this research, is supported by the key findings that students can engage with student voice as dialogue and consultation, and that they have meaningful things to say to their teachers. Notwithstanding the emergent challenge of student voice in relation to authority, procedure and established practice, and the potential 'cacophony' of student voices, this research demonstrates that these engagements are positive and constructive. They have enhanced student-teacher relationships rather than challenged the power and authority of the teacher. Embedding of student voice in the classroom has a parallel motivation based on this research evidence supporting the inclusion of marginalised, silent or silenced students. This research further points to improved engagement, participation and learning in these case-study classrooms arising from student voice. It has stimulated teacher reflection on practice and on the students' experience of that practice.

This limited and supported research engagement with student voice had a reflective and positive impact on all the participating teachers, and effected a significant change in the practice and pedagogical positioning in two of the nine participant teachers. A primary research finding however, reflects the importance and significance of situating student voice in pedagogy within the classroom relationship of subject, teacher and class. It was within this context that this research revealed the most significant motivation and effect for student voice in classrooms.

In contrast, this research indicates the functional redundancy of the student council, within current policy and guidelines as a construct for student voice at whole-school level. It equally points to its partial redundancy as a construct to reflect prefigurative democracy and active citizenship for students. The reconfiguration of the student council construct based on its currency and visible presence in post-primary schools, is arguably an achievable goal to facilitate the council to become a parallel student voice platform in schools linking a motivation for student voice in pedagogy

with a student voice in decision-making underpinned by vindicated rights and democratic citizenship.

A policy and practice initiative to embed student voice in schools is the central recommendation of this research. Such an initiative requires caution and stealth to manage and engage with the myriad issues and voices that traverse this journey.

A willingness and openness to embrace the challenge of a pure student voice of right, consultation and dialogue will be required of school leadership. This research and research internationally demonstrates the potential for student voice and equally the negativity and contrivance of tokenism. A shift in the authoritative position of the principal and board of management to embrace students within the existing partnership model of school governance will be required. A similar but less extreme change in position will be required of teachers involving a scaffolded process, demonstrated by the case-study teachers that presented challenges and some unexpected outcomes but was achieved by all, and sustained in two cases.

As with the experience of the case-study schools, situated and context based issues will and should arise as this complex yet morally justified change is gradually introduced into schools and classrooms. Such a change will be redirected, neutralised and tokenised if not accompanied by rigorous policy and professional development support. The experience of the student council, based on a weak policy framework and professional support provision demonstrates how the construct was subverted and limited within individual schools.

A professional support framework, based on clear and focused policy, accompanied by directive guidelines is required. The current student council guidelines published in 2002 require revision. These actions should inform the introduction and embedding of student voice in the classroom and a parallel restructuring of the student council, to represent two related levels of student voice in schools. Leadership development programmes, teacher professional development initiatives and programmes for beginning teachers including pre-service and induction programmes, should include guidance and support for student voice based on policy and guidelines.

The opportunity afforded by school self-evaluation should not be lost as an entry point for student voice in pedagogy and an opportunity to reconfigure the role and operation of the student council. The philosophy of school self-evaluation that centres on situated achievable school-based improvement initiatives could demonstrate the potential of student voice to a school community and equally expose the challenges of such an initiative in localised, small scale and familiar settings. Resolving and mediating these challenges at the micro level of the school could ensure

success, rather than the dramatic failure of an unsupported engagement with student voice at a macro or system level.

Linkage between the student council and curricular programmes that focus on democracy and citizenship like CSPE and the planned Politics and Society syllabus, and the statements of learning in the revised junior cycle framework should be re-established and developed. This will allow the council to be positioned as an expression of democratic citizenship, as reflected in these subjects, and as enacted and experienced through a representative and authentic student council.

Future directions - *Terra incognita*...‘there be dragons’

In the light of experiences in the UK, based on policy and inspectorate initiatives that subverted student voice towards a data-gathering source within a market-orientated view of school performance and improvement, there may potentially be ‘dragons’, albeit known dragons, in relation to the introduction of student voice in the context of the school self-evaluation initiative. For the first time, schools are being encouraged to seek out the voices of students as they self-evaluate aspects of their practice, initially focused on teaching and learning. Student voice as a term and as a concept based on dialogue and consultation has entered the discourse of everyday practice in schools and classrooms, as both primary and post-primary schools are now required to establish and complete annual cyclical self-evaluation projects with an emphasis on pedagogical practice across the whole school.

Terra incognita for student voice arises from the combination of the advancement of the use of student voice in school inspection combined with its introduction as an element of school self-evaluation. It could be argued that these are gains for a rights-based student voice through visibility and engagement by schools. The dragons emerge in the context of growing accountability, the advancing school improvement agenda and concerns for standards in literacy and numeracy. Student voice, now in its infancy in Irish schools, may be interpreted by schools as a data source to inform compliance and accountability that positions students as ‘end-users’ of a service where any opportunity for a situated and person-centred empowerment or a democratic repositioning of students to allow for dialogic consultation towards change in the students experiences of classrooms or school is eclipsed.

Notably, the student council is not referred to in the policy guidelines for school-self-evaluation in any context, and is notably absent in the context of student voice (Inspectorate, 2012a). Similarly, the planned introduction of standardised testing of students in post-primary schools from 2014, in Mathematics, English Reading and Scientific Literacy (DES, 2011c) could be interpreted as

pointing towards a performativity agenda for schools. Both developments are potentially further indicators of a journey towards *terra incognita* for a democratic and rights-based student voice as the balcony view reveals these as potential dragons lurking just offstage.

However, there is potential to keep these dragons thus positioned if two essential challenges are recognised and addressed. First is the capacity of school governance and leadership to willingly embrace a meaningful role for students as partners. Any such initiatives may require the need to revisit and amend the Education Act (1998) to potentially broaden the role of students in school decision-making and possibly in school governance. It is conceivable that regulation from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in the form of a circular letter could direct such initiatives. Whether regulation introduced centrally could succeed in achieving this policy, practice and mind set shift in control and power in school governance is certainly an exploration of *terra incognita*.

Further dragons represent the second challenge, that of the longer-term motivation of the DES towards student voice. Historically, the vague policy script for the student council, the limited direction included in the Education Act (1998) and failure to link the student council with curricular developments in democracy and citizenship could point to a limited enthusiasm for student voice. Furthermore, more recent developments in inspection and in school self-evaluation could also be viewed as the initial steps in the process of greater accountability and the measurement of school performance. If such is the case, any rights-based and democratic citizenship motivations for student voice will be replaced by instrumental performativity and accountability, as was observed in the UK since the mid nineteen-nineties. The growth and development of student voice as '*radical collegiality and dialogue*' within person-centred democratic schools and classrooms (Fielding, 1999 p. 28; 2011) in Irish schools will thus be challenged and compromised.

This study presented a new drama based on a new script. It occupied the dramatic space created by the growing awareness of children's rights and the advance of student or child voice in research and policy initiatives in Ireland. The drama was performed against a backdrop of previous research, which suggests a limited engagement of student voice at classroom level and an expressed rhetoric of the potential for a deeper engagement through the student council. This study explored this unfamiliar drama of student voice in pedagogy in the context of the classroom space and student-teacher relationship. Reflecting just one other major study on the student council in Ireland (Keogh and Whyte, 2005), this research further explored the student council through the lived experience of the members over a one-year term of office. The strength of this research study is its uniqueness in Irish schools in that it examined student voice at two levels: its enactment at

whole-school level, and its potential in the classroom. The further significant strength of this study is its concentration on the voices of the participants and their interaction within their conceptual spaces: the classroom, and the council room. The concentration was on relationship, interaction, and the transaction and shifting nature of control and power through the curriculum and examination, the subject teacher, the principal or the liaison teacher while attempting to capture the complexity and interrelated challenges and opportunities of student voice.

The limitations of the study primarily concern the inability of this researcher to penetrate and observe classroom interaction. At one level this is true to a core value of the study relating to the situated nature of the pedagogical relationship between student and teacher that an external observer may disrupt or render artificial. At another level it denied the opportunity to experience the challenge of dialogic consultation as a new and afforded privilege in the classroom.

A further debatable limitation was the small number of teachers willing to engage and the difficulty in engaging a larger number of case-study schools. This was beyond the control of the researcher but reflects a number of issues. Student voice and consultation are viewed with apprehension by most, and as a threat by many. It is noteworthy, however, that at the outset of this research in 2008, school-self evaluation and student voice were not part of the educational drama. Equally, the small number of participant schools and teachers facilitated the aforementioned ability to engage in detail with each of the teachers, liaison teachers and principals, council executive members and the focus groups of students in their own cultural contexts.

Ethical considerations informed all these research interactions, underpinned by mutual professional trust, respect, anonymity and confidentiality. Access to schools and students was by established and agreed procedures. Analysis of data towards the production of this document honoured these ethical principles.

The occupational role of this researcher as a school inspector presented both challenges and opportunities. Challenges included the need to gain the trust of the teachers in guaranteeing that data gathered would not inform any evaluative engagements with the school. At a personal level, the participants were challenged to put aside their perception of an inspector and accept the persona of a researcher. Equally, the researcher was constantly reflexive in the context of engagements with participants and on making judgements on patterns in the data in the context of research as opposed to evaluation. The opportunities afforded by the role centred on familiarity with schools and the willingness of school principals to normally engage and meet with members of the inspectorate.

Further development of this drama could focus on a wider range of case-study schools and further exploration of the variables of social class, race, gender, or school type that a larger number of cases could facilitate. A longitudinal study of student voice in the classroom following one class group over a number of school years in a larger and more varied range of schools could provide a richer data set. A study of student voice during and following the establishment of school self-evaluation and the reform of the junior cycle could provide a view into *terra incognita* and could identify the emergent direction of student voice. As the concept is in its infancy in Irish schools, robust research will be required to both map and steer the plot.

*'But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams'.*

(He wishes for the cloths of heaven, WB Yeats)

As the drama finally closes and the theatre lights brighten, the audience and cast disperse to the routine of their school lives until the lights dim again and a further drama unfolds. It is hoped that the dream of a future student voice drama will retain the voiced interaction of student and teacher, whether in pedagogy or as dialogic consultation in the classroom or at whole-school level. Right, trust, respect and a shared concern for the students' experience should inform all such interactions, positioning students and their voice as centre stage in Irish schools and classrooms irrespective of any other policy, curricular or assessment dramas that may, in the future, unfold.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

1.1 Pilot questionnaire (student)

Please do not write your name

Year	Cycle	Subject area	Gender	Teacher

Please write a short comment on the following statements:

I like going to classes in this subject because...
Comment:

I find what is being taught in this class **difficult / easy** (circle one) to understand because...

Comment:

I like the way my teacher teaches me because...

Comment:

What should the teacher do to help me to better understand what is going on in the class?

Comment

1.2 Student questionnaire 1 (as amended following pilot study)

For completion at the beginning of dialogic consultation period

Please do not write your name

Year	JC, TY or LC	Subject	Gender

Please describe what happens in class that helps you to understand and learn?

1.3 Student questionnaire 2

For completion at the end of the dialogic consultation period in class

Please do not write your name

Year	JC, TY or LC	Subject	Gender

Please write a comment on the following:

What happened in these classes that helped you to understand and learn?

What changes did you suggest to your teacher to help you to learn more or help you understand better?

1.4 Reflection sheet for students

For completion at the end of the dialogic consultation period in class

Year	Cycle	Subject area	Gender	Teacher

Please give me your reaction to the following:

(Take your time to think and reflect before you write. Please do not write your name)

I understand and I am learning in these lessons because:

I find it difficult to understand and difficult to learn in these lessons because:

What would I change in these lessons:

What would I keep the same in these lessons:

My own thoughts on these lessons:

1.5 Reflective diary prompts - teacher

- How did it go?
- How do I feel the series of lessons went following the dialogue and consultation?
- What strategies did I use arising from what the students said?
- How effective did I find the strategies that were suggested by the students?
- What difficulties did I experience in using student voice?
- How did I deal with these?
- My own thoughts?

Appendix 2

2.1 Interview Schedules

1. Interview with Principal

1. In what ways do students have a voice or a say in what happens in the school?
2. What is the role of the student council in the school?
3. How does the council operate and what are its main activities and involvements?
4. Does the council provide students with a voice or a say in what happens in school? In what ways?
5. Any particular examples of ways that students have had a voice or a say in what happens in school?
6. Any particular examples of ways that students have had a voice or a say in what happens in their classroom with their teacher?
7. Would you consider consultation and discussion between teachers and their students as an important aspect of classroom practice? In what ways?
8. As school management, have you ever consulted with students in a formal way to get their views and opinions on the operation of the school?
9. Have you ever asked teachers in a formal way? How? On what issues?
10. Have you ever asked parents? How? On what issues?
11. How would you feel about consultation with the school community to self-evaluate and identify areas for change. What challenges and opportunities would you foresee?
12. How do you think the teachers would react to such an initiative?
13. Have the student council ever engaged with the BOM or the Trustees on issues relating to the operation of the school – do the BOM or the students initiate these, and how do you feel about this?

2. Interview with student council liaison teacher

1. Tell me about the structure and organisation of the student council in your school and about your role?
2. From your point of view, what do you think is the role and purpose of the student council in the school?
3. How does the council operate on the ground on a daily or weekly basis?
4. What is the attitude of the school principal and teachers generally to the council?
5. Do you think that this is a successful council? In what ways?
6. What have been the main activities / achievements of the council recently?
7. What roles did the students who are on the council take in these achievements?
8. Tell me about your role with the council and how it works?
9. Are there aspects of the council that you would change? What are they?
10. Do you think the student council has a meaningful role and say in decision-making in the school? In what ways? Explain?

3. First interview with teacher: Phase 1

1. What is the normal classroom atmosphere in your classroom and how would you describe your relationship with your students?
2. How would you describe your teaching approaches to this subject and class group?
3. What are the most important considerations for you as you approach a topic with your class?
4. What are the main methods you use to teach your students?
5. What methods work best for you with this class?
6. How do you know if they understand what has been taught?
7. Have you ever asked your students about how you teach and how they like to learn?
8. How would you feel about asking them? Do you think it would help you to teach and them to learn?

4. Second interview with teacher on completion of phase 2

1. How do you feel about dialogue and consultation having now completed two phases with student voice?
2. Can you describe the dialogue and consultation that happened with each class?
3. What did the students say to you in their comments, and what did you change or act upon in your teaching?
4. Describe the methods you used to teach your students following the consultation and how were these different to what went before?
5. What methods worked best for you?
6. In what ways did the changes affect the students experience in your class?
7. Do you notice any particular changes in your students? In what ways?
8. Did you notice any change in your students' learning due to your use of student voice? If so, in what ways?
9. Was there any change in the classroom atmosphere and in your relationship with your students after you consulted with them? In what ways?
10. Did you notice anything unusual in relation to the reaction of boys or girls or students of different ages to the dialogue and consultation or to the changes you introduced?
11. Will you continue to consult and dialogue with your students about their experience in your classroom?

5. Student interview

1. What happens in class that helps you to learn and understand best?
2. What would make it difficult for you or hard for you to learn or understand in a lesson?
3. I am going to ask you to complete a sentence. Just think of what comes into your head when I say - A good lesson is when?
4. And a bad lesson is when....?
5. If you had the power to change what happens in your classes to make it easier for you to learn, what changes would you make?
6. How did it work when the teachers asked you what you thought about the class and if there was anything you would like to change?
7. What did you suggest to your teacher in the discussion and the questionnaire?
8. What differences did you notice in the classes after the discussion and consultation, what changes did your teacher make?
9. Was it different in class for you after the discussion and the questionnaire, in what ways?
10. Would you like this kind of consultation to continue so that you could continue to discuss what is happening in class with your teacher? Why?

6. Student Council Interview

1. Tell me how you became involved with the council?
2. How does the council operate in this school?
3. What for you is the role of the council in the school?
4. What is the council working on or doing at the moment and what is planned for the next few months?
5. What roles do the students who are on the council take in these plans and activities?
6. What role does the liaison teacher who works with you take?
7. What is the attitude of other students and teachers to the student council?
8. What about boundaries? Are there boundaries around what the council can and can't do? How do you know the limits of what you can do as a council?
9. Do you have meetings with the principal and the board of management? What happens at those meetings?
10. Do you think that the council is a voice for students and has a role in how decisions are made in the school?
11. How are you as a council member involved in decision-making and what have you been involved in recently?
12. Do you think that the role and operation of the student council could be changed or improved in any way?
13. What are the benefits for you of being involved in the council?

Appendix 3

3.1 Prompts for teacher discussion with class

In your opening lesson with the students begin a discussion with them on how you teach them and how they feel about learning and understanding.

Use the following as possible prompts:

- I am trying a slightly different approach to teaching the class.
- I want to know what you think about the way we work together in class. How I teach and how you feel that this helps you to learn.
- I also want to hear more of your voices in the class.
- I want to know what you think about the way I teach you – the way I get you to understand what we are learning about.
- This will help me to look at how I do my work.

I usually start teaching a lesson by

- Looking at your homework?
- Asking you questions based on your homework?
- Making it clear what we are going to learn?
- Other ways?

Do you feel that this works some of the time or all of the time? Should it change?

I usually continue by....

- **Make your own list!**
- Asking you questions
- Calling out notes
- Writing the main points on the board
- Explaining and simplifying the point to you
- Giving you exercises, tasks or problems to solve
- Showing you images or diagrams
- Asking you to work in pairs or groups

Do you feel that this works some of the time or all of the time? Should it change?

- Take careful note of their comments and reactions.
- Give out the questionnaire and get them to complete it there and then.
- Collect the questionnaires – take no names

In the next lessons, based on the questionnaires, outline the approach you have planned for the next unit of work.

End the phase with another questionnaire and a reflection sheet.

Appendix 4

4.1 One year on: Student voice teacher questionnaire

1. What is your understanding of the term *student voice*?
2. Have you used *student voice* in your classroom since the project ended one year ago? If yes,...in what ways? why? If no, why not?
3. Will you use (or continue to use) *student voice* in the future? Please comment
4. Did your engagement with *student voice* during the research period have an impact on?
 - Your positioning or thinking as a teacher? (Please comment)
 - Your practice in the classroom? (Please comment)

Please return by email to: domnall@flemingd.com

Appendix 5

5.1 Ethical Clearance



Appendix 6

6.1 Student Consent Form

Lisheens
Ovens
Co Cork

Date

Re: Student voice in the classroom research project.

Student name

Dear **Name of Student**,

I am working on a PhD educational research project looking at the voice of students in classrooms in post-primary schools. Your _____ (subject) teacher _____ (name of teacher) has agreed to take part and is going to ask your class about improving engagement and participation in learning. Up to four students will be interviewed in a small group relating to what they think about consulting students and using students' voices in the classroom. This group interview will take about 30 minutes and will take place in the school.

During this group interview I will record your responses using a tape recorder and I will use these responses as part of a case study of _____ (name of school). I will arrange the interview with the group of students in the school, in conjunction with your teacher and the principal. The recording, your identity and the analysis arising from the interview are confidential and will not be shared with anyone else.

If you agree, please read the attached information note and sign the consent form. Please return the form to your teacher.

Yours sincerely,

Domnall Fleming
087 7981544
domnall@flemingd.com

Information Sheet for students: Student Voice research project

Purpose of the Study: As part of the requirements for a PhD at UCC, I have to carry out a research study. The study is concerned with examining whether consulting with students and listening to what they have to say can improve their engagement and participation in learning in post-primary schools. The study will look at using the voice of students in the classroom. This research has received ethical clearance from the Social Research Ethics Committee in UCC.

What will the study involve? Your teacher will use some different methods of teaching based on consulting students on how they like to learn. This will help research if consulting students can improve engagement and participation in learning. Up to four students will be interviewed in a small group relating to what they think about consulting students and using students' voices in the classroom. This interview will take approximately 30 minutes and will be arranged in your school in conjunction with the principal and your teacher.

Why have you been asked to take part? You have been asked because your school is suitable in size, management structure and gender make-up to become one of the case study schools for this research. The school principal and your teacher have agreed to take part in the study.

Do you have to take part? No, your participation is voluntary and therefore, if you choose to take part, I am asking you to complete and sign the attached consent form. You can withdraw from the study, if you choose, even after your direct involvement. Even if you take part, you can still withdraw. In that case your documents and any transcripts will be withdrawn and destroyed.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential? Your name, the name of your school or class group will be confidential and I will ensure that no clues to your identity appear in the thesis. Any extracts from what you say, that are quoted in the thesis, will be entirely anonymous.

What will happen to the information that you give? Your responses will be analysed but kept confidential from anybody else including the school principal and the board of management. All the data will be kept confidential for the duration of the study. On completion of the thesis, they will be retained for a further six months and then destroyed.

What will happen to the results? After analysis, the results will be presented in a thesis. My supervisor, a second marker and the external examiner will see the analysis of the results. Other students may also read the thesis. The study might also be published in an academic journal.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part? I don't envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part.

If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the consent form below.

Student Consent Form

I.....agree to participate in Domnall Fleming's PhD research study and to be interviewed in my school with a small group of students.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interview with **Domnall Fleming** to be tape-recorded.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

(Please tick as appropriate:)

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

Signed.....

Date.....

6.2 Parental Consent Form

Lisheens
Ovens
Co Cork

24 September 2010

Re: Student voice in the classroom research project.

Parent(s) or Guardian(s) of _____ (Name of student)

Dear Parent(s) or Guardian(s),

I am working on a PhD educational research project looking at the voice of students in the classroom in post-primary schools. I am requesting your consent for _____(name of student) to take part. _____(name of teacher) is going to work with this class looking at ways to improve engagement and participation in learning. Up to four students will be interviewed in a small group relating to what they think about consulting students and using students' voices in the classroom.

The proposed group interview will take about 30 minutes. The interview will take place in the school. During the interview I will record the responses using a tape recorder and I will use the responses as part of a case study of the school. The principal has agreed that the school will take part in this research project.

If you agree, please read the attached information note and sign the consent form. Please return the form to the class teacher _____ (name of teacher). I will arrange the interview with the group of students in conjunction with _____ (name of teacher) and with the principal _____ (name of principal).

The recording of the interview, the students' identity and the analysis arising from the interview are confidential and will not be shared with anyone else.

Yours sincerely,

Domnall Fleming
087 7981544
domnall@flemingd.com

Information Sheet for Parents: Student Voice research project

Purpose of the Study: As part of the requirements for a PhD at UCC, I have to carry out a research study. The study is concerned with examining whether consulting with students and listening to what they have to say can improve their engagement and participation in learning in post-primary schools. The study will look at using the voice of students in the classroom. This research has received ethical clearance from the Social Research Ethics Committee in UCC.

What will the study involve? The teacher will use some different methods of teaching based on consulting students on how they like to learn. Up to four students will be interviewed in a small group relating to what they think about consulting students and using students' voices in the classroom. This interview will take approximately 30 minutes.

Why have they been asked to take part? They have been asked to take part because their school is suitable in size, management structure and gender make-up to become one of the case study schools for this research. The school principal has agreed that the school should take part and their teacher has agreed to take part in the study to help research how teaching and learning might be improved by the use of the voice of students in the classroom.

Do they have to take part? No, participation is voluntary and therefore if you give your consent for them to take part I am asking you to complete and sign the attached consent form. They can withdraw from the study if they choose, even after their direct involvement. Even if they take part in the interview they can still withdraw. In that case the documents and any transcripts will be withdrawn and destroyed.

Will their participation in the study be kept confidential? Their name, the name of your school or class group will be confidential and I will ensure that no clues to their identity will appear in the thesis. Any extracts from what they say, that are quoted in the thesis, will be entirely anonymous.

What will happen to the information that they give? Their responses will be analysed but kept confidential from anybody else, including the school principal and the board of management. All the data will be kept confidential for the duration of the study. On completion of the thesis, they will be retained for a further six months and then destroyed.

What will happen to the results? After analysis, the results will be presented in a thesis. My supervisor, a second marker and the external examiner will see the analysis of the results. Other students may also read the thesis. The study might also be published in an academic journal.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part? I don't envisage any negative consequences in taking part.

If you agree that _____ can take part in the study, please sign the consent form below.

Parental Consent Form

I _____ (Parent or Guardian) give my consent for
_____ (name of student) to participate in Domnall Fleming's
PhD research study and to be interviewed with a small group of students
The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I give permission for the interview with **Domnall Fleming** to be tape-recorded.

(Please tick as appropriate:)

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from the interview

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from the interview

Signed.....

Date.....

6.3 Teacher Consent Form

Information Sheet for Teachers: Student Voice research project

Purpose of the Study: As part of the requirements for a PhD at UCC, I have to carry out a research study. The study is concerned with examining whether consulting with students and listening to what they have to say can improve their engagement and participation in learning in post-primary schools. The study will look at using the voice of students in the classroom. This research has received ethical clearance from the Social Research Ethics Committee in UCC.

What will the study involve? You are asked to use some different methods of teaching based on consulting students on how they like to learn. This will help research if consulting students can improve engagement and participation in learning. Taking part will involve two activities.

One involves working with your students using two simple questionnaires and a reflective sheet given to them by you in the classroom. Up to four students will also be interviewed in a small group relating to what they think about consulting students and using students' voices in the classroom. This interview will take approximately 30 minutes and will be arranged in the school in conjunction with the principal and yourself.

The other activity involves only you. You are asked to complete a reflective diary and take part in a thirty-minute interview both relating to your reactions to consulting with students in your classroom.

Why have you been asked to take part? You have been asked because your school is suitable in size, management structure and gender make-up to become one of the case study schools for this research. The school principal has agreed that the school will take part in the study.

Do you have to take part? No, your participation is voluntary and therefore, if you choose to take part, I am asking you to complete and sign the attached consent form. You can withdraw from the study, if you choose, even after your direct involvement. Even if you take part in the interview or complete the reflective diary, you can still withdraw. In that case your documents and any transcripts will be withdrawn and destroyed.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential? The interview and reflective diary are confidential and your anonymity will be protected. Your name, the name of your school or class group will be confidential and I will ensure that no clues to your identity appear in the thesis. Any extracts from what you say, that are quoted in the thesis, will be entirely anonymous.

What will happen to the information that you give? Your responses will be analysed but kept confidential from anybody else including the school principal and the board of management. All the data will be kept confidential for the duration of the study. On completion of the thesis, they will be retained for a further six months and then destroyed.

What will happen to the results? After analysis, the results will be presented in a thesis. My supervisor, a second marker and the external examiner will see the analysis of the results. Other students may also read the thesis. The study might also be published in an academic journal.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part? I don't envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part.

If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the consent form below.

Teacher Consent Form

I.....agree to participate in Domnall Fleming's PhD research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interview with **Domnall Fleming** to be tape-recorded.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

(Please tick as appropriate:)

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

Signed.....

Date.....

6.4 Student Council Liaison Teacher Consent Form

Information Sheet: Student Voice in the student council

Purpose of the Study: As part of the requirements for a PhD at UCC, I have to carry out a research study. The study is concerned with examining whether consulting with students and listening to what they have to say can improve their engagement and participation in learning in post-primary schools. The study will look at using the voice of students through the student council. This research has received ethical clearance from the Social Research Ethics Committee in UCC.

What will the study involve? The study asks you to work with the student council through your normal agenda for the council for the school year. You will be asked to complete a reflective diary and be interviewed on how the council operates. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes. The reflective diary is a notebook into which you will be asked to make entries during the research period. You will be asked to write short notes describing your work with the council and how their engagement with issues operates within the normal routines and role of the council.

Why have you been asked to take part? You have been asked because your school is suitable in size, management structure and gender make-up to become one of the case study schools for this research.

Do you have to take part? No, participation is voluntary, and therefore if you choose to take part I am asking you to complete and sign the attached consent form. You can withdraw from the study if you choose, even after your direct involvement. Even if you take part in the interview and complete reflective diary, you can still withdraw. In that case your documents and any transcripts will be withdrawn and destroyed.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential? Your name and the name of your school will be confidential and I will ensure that no clues to your identity appear in the thesis. Any extracts from what you say that are quoted in the thesis will be entirely anonymous.

What will happen to the information that you give? Your responses will be analysed but kept confidential. On completion of the thesis, they will be retained for a further six months and then destroyed.

What will happen to the results? After analysis, the results will be presented in a thesis. My supervisor, a second marker and the external examiner will see the analysis of the results that comes from the interviews and reflective diary. Other students may also read the thesis. The study might also be published in an academic journal.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part? I don't envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part.

Any further queries? You can contact me: Domnall Fleming. 087 7981544.
domnall@flemingd.com

If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the consent form overleaf.

Student Council Liaison Teacher: Consent Form

I.....agree to participate in Domnall Fleming's PhD research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interview with **Domnall Fleming** to be tape-recorded

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

(Please tick as appropriate:)

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

Signed.....

Date.....

6.5 Principal Consent Form

Principal Consent Form

I.....principal of.....(name of school) agree to participate in Domnall Fleming's PhD research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interview with **Domnall Fleming** to be tape-recorded.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

(Please tick as appropriate:)

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview _____

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview _____

Signed.....

Date.....

Principal

Appendix 7

7.1 Open coding of student reflective sheet: 1st year class group

Prompt	I understand what is happening in my class because....	I find it difficult to understand what is happening in my class because....	What would I change about the way I learn in class...	What would I keep about the way I learn in class...	My own thoughts on the lessons we just completed...
Student 1	He explains everything fully and he also shows us pictures of what we are learning about	I didn't find it difficult to understand and learn as he explained everything	I would change the amount of time spent reading from the book	The diagrams DVDs and questions to be answered and the hand outs	I thought these lessons were good and he explained everything we learned fully
Line-by-line coding	<i>Clarity and Visuals</i>	<i>Clarity</i>	<i>Textbook emphasis</i>	<i>Activity and stimulus</i>	<i>Fully explained</i>
Student 2	Everything was made clear from the start and we didn't just learn and learn and learn. We looked at visual images of Rome because if you keep on doing loads of learning you cannot memorise it well	I didn't find anything difficult because they are organised well and most parts are interesting	I think when correcting homework I would leave a comment.	I would keep the visual things the same and answering questions	I thought the lessons were very good, they were detailed but there should be some more about the Roman Army because it would be very interesting
Line-by-line coding	<i>Visual</i>	<i>Organised and interesting</i>	<i>Comments on corrections</i>	<i>Answering and visuals</i>	<i>More emphasis on some topics</i>
Student 3	Watching videos of what we are doing explains what we are doing because we are doing because we can see it and picture it again later. Also when we use play dough it helps as well.	Sometimes when there are lots of definitions they can be hard to remember them all. And essays can be hard to remember when it's too long.	Shorten the essays as much as possible like summaries.	The going over the definitions during class and the discussions about what we are doing.	They are interesting when there isn't too much writing etc. Not too many tests.
Line-by-line coding	<i>Visual and hands-on</i>	<i>Factual recall</i>	<i>Easier tasks less demands on student</i>	<i>Repetition learning intention</i>	<i>Less writing and testing</i>
Theme / category	<i>Engagement by visual stimulus Clarity</i>	<i>Factual recall</i>	<i>Tedious, laborious activity</i>	<i>Clarity, activity, visuals</i>	<i>Areas of interest, assessment, notes</i>

7.2 Open coding of student interview: 5th year class group

	Interview commentary	Line-by-line coding	Theme / category
I	OK, can I ask you all then, is doing that any different now as part of the project that you are just involved in than it was beforehand or was it always like...is this the way you were always taught?	<i>Awareness of change</i>	
S	Yea...the short questions, she always had short questions but in some classes she'd ask us what would we think would help us learn better. She takes our opinion in	<i>Short questions Awareness of consultation</i>	
I	And what would people have said now can you remember. What would ye have said		
S	Just more like in essays people would prefer bullet points and paragraph formation and stuff like that so she'd type up one in an essay and in bullet points and then whichever one you prefer	<i>Full text essay or bullet point essays</i>	<i>Choice</i>
I	OK so ye get a choice		
S	Yea		
I	And that's as a result of what ye said, is it?		
SS	Yea. Yea		
S	But even on case studies before she told us to read them like, the majority of us probably wouldn't look over it but giving us to write out our own short questions on it like on the important points you'd learn it better. You're made learn it like, you're forced to learn it	<i>Students compose questions based on reading Compulsion</i>	
I	Explain that to me again about writing out your own short questions		
S	Like say there's a couple of pages in a book and you'd read through it and study it and then you'd write questions on each page like say twenty questions between 5 pages and then you'd cover up the book and answer the questions	<i>Self testing</i>	<i>Self-assessment</i>
I	Ok so you write your own questions, this is what you were saying earlier, and then you answer them. You check then do you know it.		
SS	Yea You test the person the next day in class sitting beside you	<i>Peer assessment</i>	<i>Peer-assessment</i>
I	And again is that as a result of your opinions or is it the teacher's idea.		
S	Her idea	<i>Dialogic discussion / consultation</i>	<i>Teacher decision</i>

7.3 Open coding of teacher interview: 2nd year class group

	Theme / category	Line-by-line coding	Theme / category
I	Could you tell me what happened on the day when you had the discussion about with the students and when you gave them the questionnaire		
T	Well how did it feel for me first I suppose, I was quite apprehensive about it. I was apprehensive about how they would react to it. I was also apprehensive about how they would perceive it and I was apprehensive about my own self as well about going in and doing it. I was apprehensive that they would see this as some sort of joke and that they wouldn't take it seriously because a teacher asking them their opinions wouldn't happen very much. And I was also a bit apprehensive about the fact that they might see it as a weakness and I mentioned that in my diary. That they would see this as a weakness in me asking them something about my teaching that they might see it that there was something wrong with it. Of course then there was the apprehension that you might hear a lot of things that you didn't want to hear or that you wouldn't be happy with	<i>Teacher apprehension</i> <i>Student perceptions</i> <i>Weakness</i> <i>Fear of negative comment</i>	<i>Teacher identity</i>
I	OK		
T	Am...but as it turned out it was fine. They actually reacted extremely well to being consulted, had plenty of opinions as to what could and couldn't be done and in my case were quite positive about what we were doing	<i>Students positive</i> <i>Open</i>	<i>Students' openness and positivity</i>
I	And were they better at discussing it or at the writing it down or did it make any difference.		
T	Oh... they were better at discussing it. Yea. Based on the ... I looked at the thing...the questionnaire and they were better at discussing it yea they were able to say ... A lot of them are not into writing that much but they were able to discuss it	<i>Discussion</i>	<i>Discussion as dialogic consultation</i>
I	And what did they say. What were the key things they said to you		
T	What they said was that they liked the dictionary, which I was doing anyway and they wanted to continue that. They liked the activity based learning any of those and they wanted to expand on different ones of those. They also liked the getting topics...the list of topics now not all of them but a lot of them indicated that a list of the topics throughout the particular section that would help them. And the big issue that arose was that a lot of them wanted a notes copy where I would write a few notes in a copy at the end of the class. That was a system that I didn't operate. And that was I suppose the key issue that arose was this notes copy. That was a very contentious issue because a lot of them as it turned out wanted it and there was a few didn't but there was a strong feeling that we should have a notes copy.	<i>Dictionary</i> <i>Activity-based learning</i> <i>Learning intention</i> <i>Notes copy issue</i>	<i>Students' articulate their own learning needs</i> <i>Their need for notes</i>
I	And how did you navigate the majority/minority aspect of it		
T	Well it was easy enough I just told them we were doing it and that was it. I mean I just said most people want it to do it and the one or two who didn't it was pure laziness	<i>Teacher decision</i>	<i>Authority of teacher</i>
I	Ok. And how did it feel then for you... what they said... how did you react to that		
T	Ah sure I was happy enough with it to be honest with most things. I was a bit put out all right round about the copies. I felt the notes copy was a waste of time you know what I mean because I give them out a lot of hand outs or I put a booklet together to start with anyway but as	<i>Teacher scepticism and mediation</i>	<i>Authority of teacher</i> <i>Mediation of</i>

	Theme / category	Line-by-line coding	Theme / category
	it turned out I found the notes copy to be quite...to be very beneficial because it meant I didn't have to do half as much work because now there was 10 minutes at the end of each class where we were taking notes whereas up to that I was having to fill that 10 minutes. That was one thing and the other thing was that we were getting less covered which was probably better for them		<i>outcome</i>